

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

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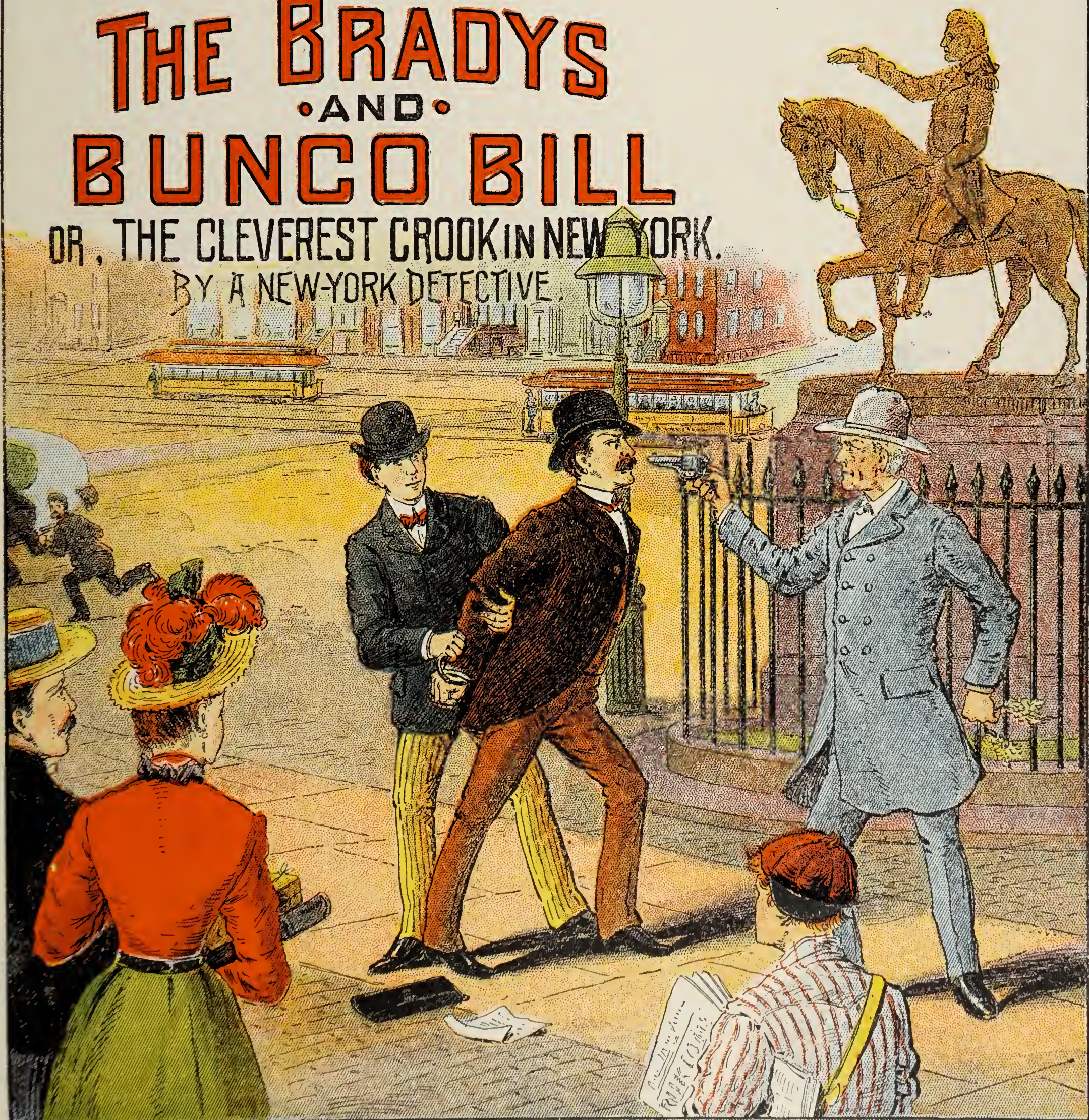
NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 8, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS •AND• BUNCO BILL

OR, THE CLEVEREST CROOK IN NEW YORK.

BY A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



"The game is up!" cried Old King Brady, thrusting his pistol into the bunco king's face. Harry slipped the handcuffs on him.

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THE BRADYS AND BUNCO BILL:

OR,

The Cleverest Crook in New York.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOGUS COUNT.

The great city of New York may truly be said to be the Mecca of crooks. There are many reasons for this.

To be sure, Gotham is blessed with a big police force and the most efficient detective service in the world.

But it is a big world in itself, and there is material for the crooked class. They are skilful and lucky enough to keep out of the meshes of the law and make a fat living out of the countrymen and "suckers" that drift into the metropolis by thousands.

In spite of the publicity given such matters by the press, in spite of printed warnings displayed in all public places, and in total disregard of common sense the rural visitor will get taken in.

The confidence man never fails to find his "Rube," the purveyor of the "queer" always locates his victim, and the detectives are ever in requisition. Such is every-day life in the great city, such it always was and likely such it always will be.

For months past, at the date of the opening of our story, police circles had been stirred as never before by the daring deeds of the cleverest crook New York had ever known.

The chief had received a message from Chicago as follows:

"Have you Bunco Bill in your city? Medium size, ordinary looking, would pass for a cheap bar-room lounge. Yet the greatest crook ever known in the West. Have reason to believe he has gone your way. Counts against him in every big city in the West. Keep an eye out.

"Yours,

CHIEF CHICAGO POLICE."

Instantly the wires became hot in all directions.

Swarms of detectives and "private dress" men were notified and every ward officer, patrolman and roundsman was authorized to be on the lookout for Bunco Bill.

But if the clever crook from the West was in New York he managed to lie low and safe for several days.

Then a hurry call came from Harlem of a wealthy jeweler who had been flim-flammed, followed by a butcher who had paid an indorsed check which proved a forgery.

The description fitted both men. Before night two more complaints were entered, one of a delivery of a valuable package by means of a forged order, and the other a complaint from an old lady who had sent a sum of money on an urgent message from her son.

It is hardly necessary to say that headquarters received a decided shock.

There was tremendous hustling, and for a time a small panic ensued.

The next day a car conductor's pocket was robbed, and a Wall street broker lost a package of United States bonds delivered to a messenger on a bogus order.

The name of Bunco Bill went from lip to lip.

Day after day fresh deeds of theft and confidence games were repeated.

The newspapers picked the matter up as a legitimate sensation.

Bunco Bill became sponsor for every mysterious crime. Columns were written of his fancied or real exploits.

It would seem as if this amount of advertising would put people on their guard.

But Bunco Bill's hand showed freer than ever. Finally one of his victims came out with a heavy reward.

This resulted in a strange hieroglyphic message being received at Police Headquarters.

Deciphered, thus it read:

"To de Cheef Perlice:

"Say cull, New York is easy. I never did strik sech a graft in my life. Afore I skip on to try 'Lunnon' I'm goin' to git Richard Croker's diamon' stud an' I'll have that gold dinner set of Willie K. Vanderbilt's. Hear me talk! I'm the only stuff. When you git me you'll grow inverted eyebrows. You ain't up to the mark. Go on!

"All fer dis time, BUNCO BILL."

Of course the dignified chief was a bit worked up on receipt of this pointed epistle. He proceeded to "shake up" the force in good earnest.

But about this time one of Bunco Bill's victims made a sensible move. She visited the Chief of the Secret Service and told her tale of sorrow.

"Madam," said that worthy with the most serene of confidence, "there are two men in this country who can trap Bunco Bill."

"I will pay them any reward for the recovery of my ten thousand dollar aigrette," said the lady. "I value it highly for its associations more than its intrinsic value."

"You shall have it if it is a possible thing," declared the chief. "Tell me your story."

Mrs. Jones-Burden, which was her name, did so.

Mrs. Burden was one of New York's famous society leaders and had command of many millions.

Her story was a trite and characteristic one. The fine hand of Bunco Bill was easily seen.

Mrs. Jones-Burden attended grand opera, and while engaged in watching the performance of "Siegfried," a favorite of hers, was favored with the card of a visitor.

"Count Muhlenbach,
Frankfort-sur-Main.

"By grace of Prince Otto Kahn."

It was a high-sounding title to be sure and smacked of delightful tours in old Germany. It chanced that Mrs. Burden was especially fond of things Deutsch, and could speak the language fluently.

But the name was unfamiliar.

There was a Count Muhlenbach in Berlin who was very close to the Kaiser. But it could not be so distinguished a personage.

The genial Mrs. Burden racked her memory to recall Count Muhlenbach.

She was a woman of the world, wise and practical. Strangely enough it never occurred to her to regard the man as an impostor.

She knew that in her years in Germany she had met many titled people.

It was possible that both the Count and the Prince had slipped her memory. In any event it was time for the interlude and she would receive the Count.

Besides, if he was a distinguished looking man, as he ought to be, his presence in her box would pique Mrs. Arden Vallant in the next row.

So a few moments later the Count was ushered in.

He proved a charming personage. Wore a monocle in quite natural style for a Deutschman, sported beautiful side whiskers and spoke German as only a German can.

The result was that he became the cynosure of eyes in other boxes. In the manner familiar to box-owners at the opera the report went around that Mrs. Burden's companion was Count Muhlenbach, equerry-in-honor to the Kaiser.

For this Mrs. Burden's maid was responsible, of course. For the rest of the evening Mrs. Burden was a winner.

The Count told of his meeting with her in Germany. Strangely enough she could not recall the occasion.

But that did not matter. In society one's memory is treacherous.

The Count remembered her, which was noble of him. She would not forget him.

And she did not.

During the entire evening he was at her command. When the curtain went down on the last chorus it was his hand deftly placed her wrap about her shoulders, and it was the same deft hand assisted her into her carriage.

It was not until she had arrived home that Mrs. Burden discovered the fact that her aigrette and a costly bracelet were missing.

Search of the carriage and of the opera box resulted in a failure to recover the missing valuables.

Still she did not suspect the suave Count Muhlenbach. He had promised to call the next day. But he did not come.

Strangely enough he had neglected to give his address. Inquiry at all the fashionable hotels and lodgings resulted in no clew.

Finally suspicion fastened itself upon the deluded woman.

She went at once to the office of the Chief of the Secret Service.

After listening to her story the chief simply shrugged his shoulders.

"You are only one of many victims," he said. "It is the work of Bunco Bill."

"I offer a large reward for his capture," she declared. "It is the first time in my life I have been buncoed."

It was then the chief made the remark in regard to the only two men in the country who, in his belief, could capture Bunco Bill.

"They are the Bradys," he declared. "Two of the keenest men in the world. They will get your man if such a thing is possible."

"Then I would like to see them," said Mrs. Burden.

"Can you wait a few moments?"

"Yes."

The chief touched a private telephone call. It connected with the lodgings of the Bradys.

"Are you there, Brady?" asked the chief.

"Yes," came the reply.

"I wish you and Harry would come down to the office at once. I have got a case for you."

"All right."

"They will be here in a very short while, madam," said the chief.

"Very well. I will wait."

It was but a very short while before the office door opened and two men of remarkable appearance entered.

Old King Brady, as he was known the country over, was a man of sixty, but as active and supple as ever he had been in his life.

He affected a peculiar style of dress, which made him conspicuous anywhere.

He wore a tight-fitting coat of blue and a broad slouch hat. His prominent chin rested upon a stock collar of the old-fashioned kind.

Harry Brady, his partner, was a much younger man.

He was in fact a pupil of the old detective. Old King Brady had taken a strong liking to the young detective and they were the warmest of friends.

As they entered the office the chief arose and introduced them to Mrs. Burden. The lady bowed politely and said:

"I am glad to meet you. I know of your fame as detectives and think I have a case for you worthy of your mettle."

"We are glad to serve you, madam," said Old King Brady, courteously. "We cannot of course guarantee you a successful solution of your case."

"I feel sure of your ability to do so," she declared.

Then the case was stated to the Bradys. They listened with marked interest.

Then old King Brady smiled grimly and turned to his young partner.

"What do you think of that, Harry?" he exclaimed. "I knew we should run against this fellow. My prediction has come true."

"Madam," said Harry Brady, "we already have a line on Bunco Bill and feel quite sure that we shall have him in limbo before to-morrow night."

CHAPTER II.

THE TROUBLES OF A NOBLEMAN.

Mrs. Jones-Burden gave a great start.

"Is that true?" she exclaimed eagerly. "Indeed that is quite wonderful. Then you know all about him?"

"Twice he has slipped us since coming to New York."

"The third time never fails."

"Ah! but it may in this case. He is by all odds the slipperiest man we have ever come across."

"Very good," said the lady, rising. "I am content to leave my case in your hands without further question. I shall await the result with confidence and interest."

"We shall do all in our power," began Old King Brady.

Then he paused.

There came a rap on the door.

"What is that?" exclaimed the chief. "Come in!"

The door opened.

A man stood on the threshold.

He was of medium height and dressed as only an Englishman can dress. His face was smooth and expressionless and he wore a monocle in his right eye.

One moment he paused on the threshold and gazed in a vacant way at the occupants of the room.

Then he drawled:

"Aw, beg pahdon! Have I mistaken the room?"

"Who do you wish to see?" asked the chief.

"I—aw—am looking for the office of the Secret Service detectives."

"This is the place."

"Thanks! Are you the chief?"

"I am."

"I ask your pahdon. I see you are busy. I will call again."

"By no means," said the chief. "Pray take a seat in the ante-room and I will be at your service in a few moments. Is your case urgent?"

"Well—aw—I might say so, don't you know. I have been robbed, what you in this country call buncoed."

"Bunco Bill!" was spoken in one voice by the listeners. Then old King Brady said:

"Perhaps you are the latest victim of the cleverest crook in New York, who is known as Bunco Bill. We are detectives and shall be glad to assist you."

"I have some curiosity to hear the story," said Mrs. Jones-Burden. "As we are both victims perhaps there is no objection to my becoming a listener. I should like to know if the same rogue did both jobs."

The Englishman bowed profoundly.

"I will not refuse," he said politely. "In fact it is not a matter of secrecy. Before this the newspapers have got the story and it will be public property very soon."

"Pray have a chair," said the chief.

"This is my card," said the Englishman, laying it on the desk. All present could read it as follows:

"Lord Burton-Carew, Hampshire, England."

"I can refer you to my bankers, the Barings, and by cable to my solicitors, Messrs. Friend, Ludgate, London. In New York I am known to but few, but I have plenty of credentials to vouch for my character."

"That is accepted," said the chief. "Let us have your story."

Lord Burton-Carew readjusted his monocle, and then began:

"I am stopping at the Holland House. Aw—a very good place. I have a friend, Sir Oliver Alston, who came over on the same boat with me. He stops at the Savoy. He has been in the habit of coming over to the Holland evenings and he brings his friends for a little game of baccarat. Yes, don't you know.

"Well—aw—it was Thursday at dinner that a gentleman called on me with a letter of introduction from Alston, don't you know. He was a mutual friend, and Alston, being in Washington, would be happy if my friend would be permitted to fill his place.

"Of course I was delighted. He was a genial fellow and could play the game of baccarat all right.

"But when the evening was over he was a loser of two hundred dollars. Awkward position, for don't you know, he didn't have the money, but a draft on the Barings for five hundred pounds. Of course we told the deah fellow that it was of no consequence, but he wanted to settle, so—ahem! damme I cashed the five hundred pound draft.

"Would you believe it, the fellow was an impostor. The draft was a bogus one. I never was so cheated in my life."

Lord Carew paused to wipe the moisture from his heated brow.

Old King Brady leaned forward.

"Did the fellow have blue eyes?"

"Yes, that is so."

"And did you notice a very slight cast in the one he used a monocle for?"

"Yes, yes, damme, that's right."

"Bunco Bill again!"

The detectives, the chief and Mrs. Burden all looked at each other.

The Englishman stared stolidly at them.

"Aw—I never was so cheated."

"And you want our services to catch this villain?"

"Yes, that is it."

"Very well," said Old King Brady. "I have only to inform you that we are on his track. You are only one of many victims. What name did he give you?"

"He called himself Chauncey Vane, M. P., from Essex. Of course I accepted him on the letter from Sir Oliver."

"Where did he stop?"

"At the Savoy."

"Did you inquire there for him?"

"Yes."

"He was not there?"

"Not when I called. But he had been stopping there. I was never so deceived in my life."

In spite of themselves the listeners laughed at the Englishman's seriousness.

"Never fear," said the chief. "These men will do all they can to recover your money."

Lord Carew mopped his brow.

"It is awkward for me, deuced awkward," he declared.

"I don't know how he did it. I am going over to the Savoy now to see if he comes back there."

Old King Brady shook his head.

All smiled at the nobleman's simplicity.

"You might look for him a good ways from the Savoy," said the old detective. "You may be sure he is not there."

"But at least I will feel better to go there," persisted Lord Carew. "And I would be pleased if a detective would go with me."

The Bradys looked at the chief.

"There can be no harm in it," said Old King Brady. "Let us both go."

"All right," agreed Harry.

"I shall be grateful," said his lordship.

Mrs. Jones-Burden now arose. She bowed graciously and said:

"It is evidently the same man who victimized me," she said. "I hope you will capture him and that Lord Carew will recover his money."

His lordship arose and bowed profoundly.

"I reciprocate the sentiment," he said. "And I trust you will recover your most costly aigrette."

Mrs. Jones-Burden gave a violent start. She stared at the Englishman.

"What?" she exclaimed. "Has it leaked out that my aigrette was stolen? I thought that known hitherto only to myself."

For a brief instant the Englishman seemed nonplussed. But only for an instant. Then he looked with child-like wonder from one to another of those present.

"Ah! have I spoken wrong?" he asked. "Did I not hear it mentioned by you that it was an aigrette that you lost?"

"I do not think the term has been used by any of us since you came into the room," she said. "Has it, gentlemen?"

"I think not," said the chief.

"Not to our recollection," said the Bradys.

"Well—I—I really cannot say how I got the idea," stammered his lordship. "I heard it or saw it in a newspaper—that was it. A list of your valuables and the costly one was an aigrette. I cannot recall the name of the newspaper. But assuredly I saw it."

Mrs. Burden's eyes blazed.

"My maid has told the newspaper men," she snapped. "I will discharge her immediately on getting home."

"Wait!" said Old King Brady, with an odd light in his eyes. "Do not discharge her, Mrs. Burden, until you hear from me again."

His lordship's face was a lake of placidity. Mrs. Burden, with a few more words, took her departure.

Old King Brady looked critically at Lord Carew.

"Queer about that aigrette, wasn't it," he said carelessly. "She evidently thought she had kept her loss a secret."

"Aw—you can't baffle the reporters, don't you know," said his lordship with a yawn. "Shall we go now?"

"Yes."

The Bradys spoke a few words with the chief and then accompanied Lord Carew to the street.

They took a cab for the Holland House.

In due time they arrived there. On the way Lord Carew told the story with more detail. The Bradys at once recognized the work as that of Bunco Bill.

Arrived at the hotel Lord Carew applied at the desk.

"Any messages for me?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the clerk. "A gentleman left his card and a letter."

Lord Carew took the card and passed it to the Bradys.

"Baw Jove!" he exclaimed. The name on the card was:

"Chauncey Vane, M. P., Essex, Englandl."

"What do you think of that?" said his lordship. "Demmed polite, to leave his P. P. C. card. I like the man's cheek!"

The Bradys were not a bit surprised. It was exactly like the work of Bunco Bill. He was nothing if not dashing.

His lordship now broke the seal of the letter. As he read his eyes opened wide.

"Hang me for a fool!" he gasped. "Did you ever see the like of his impudence?"

His lordship gave the letters to the detectives. Thus it read:

"My Esteemed Lord Carew:

"No doubt you think it shabby of me to give you that worthless draft. But no doubt you can appreciate my position better after you have had the same experience. I came to America with plenty of funds. I dare not draw on my home reserve yet. I needed five hundred pounds and took this way to get a loan which might have been refused.

"By so doing I have saved myself much inconvenience. At your expense, you will say, and a rogue's way. But you shall not be the loser. By way of assurance of my good faith I enclose my I. O. U. for the five hundred.

"I know in the generosity of your soul you will pardon this slight advantage I have taken of you, and on our next meeting, when I shall be in better circumstances, you will mulct me of four times as much at the delectable game of baccarat.

"I have the very great honor, my dear lordship, of subscribing myself always,

"Your humble servant,

VANE."

The Bradys read this astonishing and remarkable epistle with varied emotions.

If they had dared to yield to a natural impulse they would have laughed. The matter certainly had its humorous side.

CHAPTER III.

THE BRADYS BUNCOED.

There was no manner of doubt that Bunco Bill was the cleverest crook in New York.

He had made his mark.

In all their career the Bradys had never met his like. He was the creme-de-la-creme of the profession.

His lordship looked at the Bradys sharply through his monocle.

"A fine scrape!" he said.

"Very true!" said Old King Brady. "It looks like the work of Bunco Bill. Yet, of course, we are not sure of it."

"Ah, but the man was an impostor."

"Then you are sure he is not really what he claims?"

"I have here a complete list of the members of the British Parliament for many years back. The name of this man Vane does not appear in it."

"Then there is no doubt he is no other than Bunco Bill," declared Harry. "No other crook in New York could have carried off so clever a scheme."

"That is right," said Old King Brady with conviction. "That is the way of it."

"Well," said his lordship uneasily, "what am I to do?" "Is there any way to recover my five hundred pounds?"

"I hardly know. We will do our best to get your man."

"Then you can promise nothing more?"

"No."

His lordship was much disturbed. He walked up and down swinging his monocle.

"The truth is—aw," he said slowly, "I am in a deuced bad box. You see, it was all the cash I had on deposit in America. I have cabled for more funds. I need some money. My remittance cannot get here for full two weeks yet. What shall I do?"

"How much do you require?" said Old King Brady.

"I ought to have a thousand dollars at once. I may need another thousand before the week is out."

Old King Brady pulled out his check book.

"That is all right," he said. "I am glad to accommodate a friend. Here is my personal check for one thousand dollars."

His lordship was profuse in his expressions of gratitude.

"This is a favor which shall be repaid," he said warmly. "Believe me, you have done me a great kindness. My remittance will be here in a few days and I will pay you a bonus."

"No bonus is required," said Old King Brady. "It is all right. I am glad to accommodate your lordship."

"And you will run down this impostor, this dark swindler. Baw Jove! I believe you can do it."

"We will do our best," said the old detective. "In the meantime, if you get a clew be sure to let us know about it."

"Ah, you may be sure," said Carew eagerly. "You shall know at once. There shall be no delay. In the meantime I shall wait for another visit from you."

"You may not see us again until we get our man," declared Old King Brady. "Then we will let you know. You can always get word to us at the office."

The Englishman bowed and shook hands warmly with the Bradys, who now took their leave.

Thus matters stood as the Bradys entered upon the case.

Bunco Bill was at large and it was their province to catch him.

"We'll get him," said Old King Brady with resolution. "I think it a capital plan for us to rig up disguises and pretend to fall into his hands as easy suckers."

"A capital plan," cried Harry. "You have said aright. Nothing could work better. But how can we place ourselves in his way?"

"That we must leave to chance. My idea is to impersonate new arrivals from the Far West, with plenty of gold in our pockets and little knowledge of metropolitan ways."

"It cannot fail to work."

"Then it is agreed."

"Yes."

The Bradys at once proceeded to make up as typical Westerners—men from the mines with plenty of wealth and a manner bespeaking liberal prodigality.

Then they frequented Broadway and all the public places.

It seemed as if in this way they must certainly run into Bunco Bill.

For three days they persisted in this sort of work.

But without avail.

Bunco Bill did not materialize.

He somehow overlooked the two promising victims, or else fate did not throw them in his way.

The Bradys were ever patient and painstaking to the last degree.

But it indeed was a tax upon patience to waste all these days in useless quest. At last Harry said:

"We don't seem to have any luck, partner. Suppose we call on Lord Carew and see if he has a fresh clew."

"Not a bad idea!" agreed Old King Brady. "That is what we will do."

So they went to the Holland House and inquired for his lordship.

The clerk looked at them in a quizzical way.

"Who did you wish to see?" he asked in a polite way.

"Lord Carew!"

The clerk turned to a companion and said something in a low tone. Then two men leisurely sauntered up and stood behind the Bradys.

"Carew is not here now," said the clerk.

"Not here?" exclaimed Old King Brady. "When did he leave?"

"About three days ago."

"Why—that is odd. We met him here three days ago and he had no idea of taking his departure."

"That does not alter the fact."

"Can you tell us where he has gone?"

"No. I wish we knew," said the clerk in a peculiar tone.

"Pardon me!" said one of the men at Old King Brady's elbow. "But did you know his lordship well?"

Both detectives turned. In an instant they began to see the game.

"I see!" said Old King Brady. "You are a detective. You belong to this hotel?"

"Well, you are right," was the reply. "Lord Carew beat

this hotel out of his bill. We are anxious to get news of him."

"I am as anxious as you," said Old King Brady, showing his star.

"What?" gasped the hotel detective. "Secret Service?"

"Yes."

"And you—you are looking for this man?"

"We are. I think there must be some mistake. Lord Carew is a nobleman of wealth and position. He would not go away intentionally to defraud this hotel."

"Well," said the hotel detective doggedly, "the fact remains that he has gone."

"But his baggage——"

"He never had any!" declared the clerk. "That is the odd part of it. He put on all the airs of an aristocrat, but never had a trunk or a change of dress so far as I knew."

"How long a stay did he make?"

"Only four days. Our usual rule is to make guests without baggage pay in advance. But he looked responsible."

"That is very odd."

"Can you vouch for him?" asked the hotel detective.

"Well, no, not exactly," stammered Old King Brady. "He came to the office with a complaint of being victimized by Bunco Bill, the confidence man."

The hotel detective and the clerk exchanged glances.

Then the latter's face lit up.

"Ah, I came near forgetting," he said. "The day his lordship disappeared he left a letter here to be given to the Bradys, detectives, if they should call for him."

The clerk took down from the letter box an envelope and handed it to Old King Brady.

Astonished, the old detective gazed at the superscription.

It was addressed to James Brady, and the writing was a full, flowing hand. It did not compare with the cramped hand written by the impostor Vane.

The Bradys looked at each other and a curious light shone in their eyes. The same thought was in the mind of each.

Old King Brady broke the seal.

What he read gave him a curious thrill.

"To the Bradys, so-called detectives: I understand you are on my trail and are bound to get me, i. e., if you can. Thank you very much for the loan of the thousand. It will help me much to tide over a little financial trouble I have. Say, but you are easy; in fact, the easiest thing I have struck yet. It is a heap of satisfaction to beard the lion in his den. How he will growl now. I think I may turn detective myself some day just to give you a few points on the game. Ha, ha, ha! What a joke. Tra-la-la, till the next time. I'm a dead easy one, I am."

"Yours for fun,

CAREW——B. B."

Old King Brady's shrewd eyes burned with a curious light.

"There is just one sentiment here that I agree with, Harry. For once in our lives we are dead easy."

"By Jove!" said the young detective frankly. "I was never so taken in in my life. He is the cleverest crook in New York."

The hotel detective and the clerk were as much surprised as the Bradys.

"Bunco Bill," said the clerk. "Well, well! See how he has signed himself."

"Carew—B. B. Bunco Bill that is," said the hotel detective.

"We will admit that we were well played for suckers," said Old King Brady, "but we shall have Mr. Carew's scalp just the same."

The Bradys left the hotel.

The startling revelation that they had themselves been cleverly buncoed by Bunco Bill was an eye-opener for them.

"Well, that beats me," said Harry with a gasp of sheer amazement. "He certainly fooled us well."

"Yes, he did!"

"It is in order now to turn the tables on him."

"If we are able to do so!"

The detectives were at a loss just how to go to work.

In order to get a line on their bird they must first find him. This was certainly a hard task.

All manner of theories were discussed and weighed.

But still the Bradys remained as deeply in the fog as ever. Bunco Bill was a veritable will-o'-the-wisp.

"I suppose we can only peg away and trust to luck," said Harry. "But I wish we could get a clew."

"It is certainly baffling."

But the detectives did not lose faith.

They knew enough of criminal nature to rest assured that sooner or later Bunco Bill must make a mistake.

It is a dead sure thing with the average criminal.

His career had been meteoric. Now it would turn against him when the right moment came.

For the evil doer cannot prosper but for a time. It is written that inevitable downfall must overtake him.

And before nightfall of that day the first of a chain of incidents led the Bradys to believe that success must certainly be theirs.

For the last three days nothing had been heard from Bunco Bill.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

In the history of full nine-tenths of the cases of crime on record the ruin of the crook has been accomplished through the medium of a woman.

"Get the woman and you'll get the man" is an axiom among detectives.

Nearly every crook is fond of the society of women.

Invariably they have a female confederate, friend or ally.

In many cases these female partners are the means of

much assistance to the crook. Oftentimes their calmer judgment and advice, coupled with inherent faithfulness, makes a balance wheel for the criminal.

The Bradys felt confident that a man of Bunco Bill's stamp would have a confederate of this sort.

So they also kept on the lookout for this possible "woman in the case." And the opportunity came.

They still wore their disguises of Western men, with money to burn. They had just reached Madison Square and turned to cross the park when Harry saw a tall, veiled woman coming through a side path.

Her face could not be seen, but she looked straight at the detectives. Harry noticed that she was well dressed, and the manner in which she gazed at the detectives attracted his attention.

It seemed for a moment as if the woman was really going to speak to them. But she passed on.

It was a common enough incident in a big city like New York.

So Harry gave it no further thought and walked on. Despite this the woman's figure was stamped on his memory.

It was the noon hour and Old King Brady suggested that they enter a near-by restaurant for the purpose of eating a meal.

"I am hungry," he declared. "This is a good place to eat."

"I'm with you," agreed Harry.

They seated themselves at a table. The place was quite crowded.

Soon they were discussing a hearty menu, and were thus absorbed when Harry gave a start.

At a table across the aisle sat a woman. She had entered unseen by him.

It was the veiled woman he had seen in the park.

But her veil was lifted now and Harry could see that her face was one of rare girlish beauty.

She shot a dazzling glance at him, and the young detective for a moment thought there was a challenge in her great brown eyes.

But only for a moment.

She did not look his way again.

Curiously and for no good reason which he could define, the detective became interested in the woman.

She had ordered a light repast and was eating it when the waiter placed a check at her plate.

She reached to her belt for a supposed chatelaine bag and then started up with an expression of surprise and dismay.

"I have been robbed!" she cried loudly.

"Robbed!" exclaimed the detectives, and started up. There was an instant thought of Bunco Bill.

The woman was in great distress.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she said piteously. "My purse with all my money is gone. I cannot pay the bill."

Of course the attention of all in the vicinity was attracted to her. People left their seats and for a moment there was some excitement.

The proprietor came up hastily.

"You cannot have been robbed here, madam," he said. "We are sure you had not your chatelaine bag when you entered."

"But what shall I do?" she moaned, while her eyes filled. "I cannot pay the charge."

"It is all right, madam," said the restaurant keeper. "You can send the money in."

"You are very kind," she said falteringly. "But there were other valuables in the bag. Oh, I must recover it."

"Do you wish a detective?"

"Yes, yes, anything!" she cried, wringing her hands wildly. At this, with chivalry, Harry stepped forward.

"Allow me to pay the score," he said politely. "You may repay me at some future time."

For a moment the woman's figure stiffened and haughtiness asserted itself. She fixed a questioning glance upon Harry.

"It is hardly necessary," she said stiffly. "I thank you, though, for your offer. But the restaurant keeper will trust me."

With this she tendered him a card.

The boniface glanced at it and instantly made an obsequious bow. It was the name of a well-known lady of wealth in the upper part of Fifth avenue.

"It is all right, madam," he declared. "I pray you will continue your meal. We are at your service."

"But what am I to do about my chatelaine bag?" she said with distress. "It contained one hundred dollars which I was to bestow upon a needy family as a charity this afternoon. They are on the verge of starvation and I have not time to go to my banker."

Harry had subsided and sank back into his chair.

Again the restaurant keeper bowed profoundly and spoke in a low tone to the woman, whose face cleared instantly.

She smiled sweetly.

"It is not the sum of money," she said. "It is ridiculously small. But the disappointment to the poor family——"

"It is all right, madam," said the restaurant keeper affably. "We are glad to serve you."

The lady sank back in her chair and ordered a fresh course, which was much more expensive than the first.

The waiters hovered about her as if she were a person of importance.

After a while one of them came up and placed a sealed envelope on the table beside her.

She smiled politely and placed the envelope in her bosom.

At this Old King Brady leaned over and said:

"Pardon me, madam, but if you can give us the details of your case we may be able to recover your pocketbook."

But the woman only bowed coldly and said:

"It is so very small a loss that I shall think no more of it. Perhaps the thief was needy and driven to desperation. I would not prosecute."

"But—we are detectives——"

She gave a start and fixed her beautiful brown eyes upon them. Then she arose:

"I really have no time to discuss it," she said curtly. "I do not require your services."

With which she passed with stately manner down the aisle between the tables. At the desk she said with a bewitching smile:

"I will send my secretary down to settle with you for the kind favor."

The proprietor bowed profusely. The next moment she was on the street.

Up to this moment the Bradys had been in a curiously dumb state. Whether it was owing to some hypnotic influence which the woman possessed or what else it was hard to say.

But the moment she disappeared they awoke.

And with a violent start.

Like a flash a sudden thought came to both. They looked at each other.

"How is this?" exclaimed Harry. "Do you see anything irregular?"

"We are fools."

Both detectives started up.

They proceeded quickly to the desk. Old King Brady beckoned the proprietor.

"Look here, my friend," he said, "will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Did you just advance the lady who lost her pocketbook one hundred dollars?"

The man stiffened.

"That is a private matter," he said coldly.

"Well, it will very soon be public," said Old King Brady.

"What do you mean?"

"Who was the lady?"

"Mrs. J. Dunn-Brown of Forty-fourth street. She is one of the wealthiest ladies in the city."

"Oh, you know her, eh?"

"I know Mrs. Brown is a wealthy woman and here is her card."

He produced the pasteboard. The detectives shrugged their shoulders as they glanced at it.

"You are done brown," said Old King Brady. "The lady whom this card is supposed to belong to is dead for a year past. The woman has swindled you."

The restaurant keeper gasped.

"What!" he exclaimed feebly. "Are you speaking the truth?"

"The whole truth and nothing less."

The restaurant keeper was overwhelmed. But the detectives lost no time.

They made for the street and inaugurated a blind search for the woman. A cleverer confidence game they had never witnessed.

"And to think that it should occur right under our noses," said Harry with disgust. "It shows what a dopey pair we are."

Old King Brady was fully as disgusted with himself as Harry was.

"Why, everything was suspicious from the first," said Old King Brady. "Now I call to mind the fact that the woman had certain familiar features."

"She was clever."

"You are right. The more I think of it the better satisfied I am that she is no other than Dolly Vane, the Chicago female crook and confidence woman."

Harry gave a start.

"We are on!" he cried.

"What?"

"Dolly Vane was known in Chicago as a pal of Bunco Bill."

The detectives stared at each other.

"Fools!" gasped Old King Brady. "Didn't she give you the eye, Harry, when we were crossing the park?"

"Yes, but I thought it only a bit of coquetry."

"If we had given her a cue when she first entered the restaurant we would have had the lead."

The detectives were overcome with chagrin at this palpable mistake made by them.

But they saw their chance.

Here was evidence that Bunco Bill had a pal in New York and a female at that. It would be easier to get on her track and thus eventually get at the king of bunco men himself.

"It is certain that the confiding restaurant keeper has lost his money."

"Sure!"

"Dolly is capable of giving Bunco Bill himself a close call."

"You are right."

"Well, we must find her if we can. It may be easier. If we can once get on her track we will soon round up the pair of them."

"That we will."

The Bradys spent the rest of the day trying to get another glimpse of Dolly Vane. But it was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

No trace of her could be found anywhere. It was certain that she had made good her escape.

But it was just as certain that she was somewhere in the county, or rather in the city of New York, and the Bradys were bound to find her.

CHAPTER V.

LOOKING FOR BIGGER GAME.

Two days passed.

The disgruntled restaurant keeper foolishly told his story to the newspaper reporters. Like a flash the story went all over the city.

It was considered one of the cleverest confidence tricks ever played in Gotham.

Detectives and police were all on the lookout for the captivating female crook.

But Dolly Vane was by far too circumspect and shrewd to be caught.

One day the Bradys, after a long and hard quest in the portions of lower New York, entered a cable car to return up-town.

Harry purchased a newspaper and fell to reading it.

By chance his eye encountered a "personal" column.

He glanced carelessly over it until his eye was attracted by a peculiar advertisement.

Thus it read:

"Puritan—Twenty-first night. All sound but vain. Uno—Hub."

To the ordinary reader this peculiar notice would be as undecipherable as the hieroglyphics on an obelisk.

But Harry, by a strong prescience, seemed to fathom the cipher at a glance.

He gave a great start.

"I say, partner," he exclaimed, "read that carefully."

Old King Brady complied.

Then he looked blank.

"Well!" he asked.

"Do you see anything?"

"It is Greek to me."

"Look it over again."

The old detective did so.

"I make nothing of it," he said finally. "It is the most hopeless of puzzles. You might read it a dozen ways."

"Wait," said Harry. "I believe it is a clew."

"A clew?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Wait and see."

The young detective took out his notebook. With a pencil he made the following transcription:

"Puritan," he said. "What does that suggest?"

"It might suggest a hundred things."

"Very true! Let us take the nearest. Puritan is the name of a steamer on the Fall River Line."

"Well?"

"Let me put that down and assume that it is the steamer referred to. Twenty-first night. This is the twenty-first day of the month."

"Whew!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "You have got the line. Go on."

"Now we have 'all sound.' I take it that interpreted means by way of the Sound. That is to say, the steamer Puritan, to-night, by way of Long Island Sound."

"Good enough!"

"That is the interpretation."

"Undoubtedly."

"Somebody is going on that steamer to-night and makes it known thus to somebody else."

"Just so."

"It is only a case of thousands."

"Yes."

"Now let us go further: All sound, but vain. There you are: Vain—Vane!"

Old King Brady gave a violent start.

"Dolly Vane!" he ejaculated. "Do you think it?"

"Why not? Let us go on: Uno—Hub."

"Yes."

"'Uno' is you know. Hub is the current term for Boston. There you are!"

Old King Brady studied the cipher for some time.

Then he said:

"There is no doubt that you are right, Harry. Some person has taken this way of acquainting another that they will go to Boston by the Puritan on the night of the twenty-first."

"To-night."

"Yes. Now, if your translation of the third sentence is correct, the name Vane would suggest that Dolly is the author of this advertisement."

"There you are!"

"Harry, it is right," said Old King Brady with quick inspiration. "Let us take the trail."

The young detective was jubilant.

"What luck!" he cried. "We have certainly hit the mark."

"I believe it, too."

The Bradys went at once to their lodgings.

It was decided to work in a disguise.

Old King Brady was to make up as a florid old millionaire of aristocratic appearance.

Harry was to be his son, a fashionable young society favorite.

So the Hon. M. P. White and his son, Rollo White, entered their names on the stateroom list of the Puritan that night, bound for Boston.

When the passengers crowded aboard at the sailing hour of five o'clock, these two gentlemen stood on the promenade deck and watched them closely.

Not a person crossed the plank who was not carefully scrutinized.

Suddenly a cab drove up.

Out of it stepped a woman.

The Bradys gave a start.

It required but a glance to recognize the graceful figure of the veiled confidence woman, Dolly Vane.

She paid the cabby and crossed the plank just as it was being hauled aboard.

"There she is!" breathed Harry.

"For a dead sure thing."

"We hit the mark."

"You are right."

Dolly came aboard the boat and a porter carried her luggage to her stateroom.

The Bradys were careful to secure the number of this.

It would have been an easy matter for them to have lagged their game then and there.

But this would have been only a partial conquest. They were looking for bigger game.

They felt quite sure that she was going to Boston to meet Bunco Bill. Else why the personal in the newspaper?

The detectives would wait until Boston was reached.

Then it would be possible to bag both the birds. At least this was their hope.

They made themselves comfortable aboard the steamer.

There was a large crowd of people on board. The Hon. Mr. White and his son promenaded the galleries and listened to the music of the orchestra.

Then they went down to supper.

Apparently they were engrossed in each other's conversation, but as a matter of fact they were on the watch for Dolly Vane.

Not a face escaped their scrutiny, for it had occurred to the Bradys that she might have accomplices aboard.

There was a faint theory that the bunco king himself might be a passenger. But this speedily became an improbability.

The Bradys had partially finished their meal when what they most desired came to pass.

Down into the dining cabin came a graceful female figure.

With swish of costly skirts and filling the air with a faint perfume, Dolly Vane came down the saloon.

The head waiter sprang obsequiously to make room for her, and as luck would have it she was plumped down exactly opposite the two Bradys.

For a moment the detectives felt a queer sense of breathlessness.

Never in his life had Old King Brady found it so hard to maintain his composure and play his part.

Opposite them was the clever woman who had tricked the restaurant keeper out of his hundred dollars so easily.

Her eyes were fixed upon them and it seemed to the detectives as if she had really probed their disguise.

But they quickly recovered and with utmost composure they continued their conversation.

Much was said for effect and the Bradys calculated cleverly that the confidence woman would take the bait.

Presently she yawned and said:

"Pardon me! May I ask you for the celery? My waiter is not about here."

"With pleasure," replied Harry. Then he met her gaze.

There was a challenge in her lustrous brown eyes. The young detective made it a point to answer it.

She smiled in a most artless way and said ingeniously:

"Could you tell me at what time we reach Fall River?"

"Quite early. About five o'clock I believe," replied Harry.

"At such a dreadful hour? Must we rise at that time?"

"Oh, no."

"At what time does the train go to Boston?"

"At various hours. The first about seven, I believe."

"How dreadfully early. I am sure Maurice will not be on hand at that hour. 'You see,' she said, with an engaging smile, 'my cousin, Maurice Brown, will meet me at the

Boston station. I do hope he will be there, for I cannot wait."

The Bradys saw the bait and at once seized it.

They knew at once that they had the best of the wretched woman before them. She did not for a moment suspect their identity.

It was her game to draw them on and make them victims of a confidence game.

The detectives were only too ready to fall into the trap with their eyes wide open, for they believed that it would afford them the opportunity to locate Bunco Bill, who they felt sure was to meet the woman in Boston.

She affected perfect guilelessness and might have deceived an ordinary person. The Bradys saw that she was master of her trade.

So they continued to maintain the conversation, which drifted from one subject to another.

After the meal was over they walked out on deck. Miss Wilson, of Baltimore, as she gave her name and address, was very happy to accompany them.

"I feel that I already owe you a great debt," she said ingenuously. "It is so dreadful to travel alone." Then to Old King Brady: "You remind me so much of my dear uncle, Mr. Ward, of Richmond. He is awfully good to me."

"Kindly regard me as an uncle until we reach the end of your journey," said Old King Brady gallantly, "and as much longer as you choose."

"I hope you will not think me forward in claiming your acquaintance in this way. Dear me, I don't know what Maurice will say."

"We'll fix it with Maurice," said Harry. "Just introduce us when you meet him. Very likely we may belong to the same lodge."

"Oh, how jolly," she gurgled. "I am sure you will find Maurice a gentleman. Dear boy! I have a sum of money I am taking to him from my Aunt Charlotte."

She cast a furtive glance about her.

"I left it in the stateroom," she said in a lowered tone. "Five hundred dollars. Just think of it. Do you think it will be safe there?"

The Bradys shot swift glances at each other. The confidence game had already begun to materialize.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLEVER WOMAN.

Miss Wilson looked up archly and so trustfully into Old King Brady's face that for a moment he was nonplussed.

He said undoubtedly the very thing she expected and wished for.

"Indeed, Miss Wilson, I should say it was very unsafe to leave that sum of money in your stateroom. One should always carry money securely on the person."

She gave a little shudder.

"Dear me! I know so little about the world," she said in a tremulous way. "Can I ask a favor of you? Do you know, the money is a nightmare to me. I would feel so much safer if it were safe with somebody else. Oh, would it be too much to ask of you to care for it for me until I meet Cousin Maurice in the morning?"

For a moment the detectives were staggered.

Old King Brady managed to say:

"But I am a stranger."

"Oh, no, no! You are honest, I know. I will trust you. Come! You shall keep it for me. You are strong and not afraid of thieves. Dear me! I cannot sleep to-night with that money in my stateroom."

"But—my dear Miss Wilson," began the detective.

"No, you shall not refuse. Oh, come. I can hardly wait to get there. I feel very strange about it. Please oblige me!"

"Well," said the old detective, "we will try and advise you."

She started nervously for her stateroom. The Bradys followed.

They knew well enough what the result would be. They could see the whole game.

But there was no way to evade the issue.

For the furtherance of their own plans they could not back out. So it was decided to go the limit.

Just what they expected happened.

She rushed to the door of her stateroom. The key was in the door and it was slightly ajar.

A gasp of dismay escaped her.

"Oh, my! how careless! I forgot to take the key. Dear me! What if the money is gone!"

With great excitement she pushed the door wide open. She rushed to the berth and pulled down the mattress. Then a great shriek of dismay escaped her.

"Oh, I am lost!" she wailed. "I have been robbed. The money is gone!"

Her cry attracted the stewardess and other attaches of the boat.

They came rushing up.

In less time than is taken to tell it, the report had spread that a robbery had occurred.

Miss Wilson was quite hysterical. The steamer detective appeared on the scene and an investigation was made.

But it resulted as the Bradys knew it would, in no clew. Passengers crowded about and all was confusion.

Of course it was impossible to find the thief.

The stewardess did her best to console and comfort Miss Wilson, but she was quite inconsolable.

After a long time, however, she grew calmer.

Every effort was made to find the missing money. The stateroom was turned inside out.

The Bradys quietly waited the outcome. They did not interfere.

"I tell you she is a clever actress," declared Harry. "I never saw her equal. Her grief is very real."

"You are right. But wait for the sequel."

"We will be the victims of that."

"Yes."

This prophecy was fulfilled later.

After a time interest in the robbery died out. People scattered to retire to their staterooms, for the hour was getting late.

But Miss Wilson slipped away from the stewardess and joined the Bradys, who were in the saloon.

Her manner was pathetic and exceedingly plaintive as she said:

"Oh, what shall I do? I can never face Cousin Maurice without that money. He will surely meet me in Boston and he will look for the money. You see, he asked Aunt Charlotte for it for a very urgent purpose. It will mean his financial ruin. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do!"

She began to weep violently.

"If I could explain it all to Aunt Charlotte she would make the loss good," she explained. "But I cannot return to see her. Oh, I am ruined!"

She wept bitterly. The detectives exchanged significant glances.

Old King Brady had made up his mind to a plan of action.

"Tut, tut, my dear!" he said. "You can telegraph your aunt when you get to Boston."

"Do you think so?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes."

Then her face fell.

"No! she would not understand. I could only explain it in person. Oh, poor Maurice! He will be ruined."

"Oh, don't give up yet. Wait and see what he has to say."

"Oh, but I do not want him to know that I lost the money. He would never forgive me. If I could only get the money to give him—earn it or borrow it from a friend. Oh, who will lend it to me? I shall pay it back as soon as I see Aunt Charlotte."

She looked half hopelessly and with child-like simplicity at the detectives.

It was a critical moment.

Old King Brady knew that the game hung on the next move. His brain was quick to act.

"You are sure your Aunt Charlotte would make the amount good?" he asked.

Her manner stiffened and her eyes flashed.

"Oh, I am not asking the loan of you," she said with asperity. "I mean to try some friend of mine."

Old King Brady whistled.

"Are we not your friends?"

"I don't know," she said coldly.

"Well, we do."

"Can you suggest a likely party to loan me the money? I shall surely repay it."

"Yes."

"Who?"

"We will loan you the money."

Her face became all dimples and smiles. She turned a dazzling gaze upon the detectives.

"Oh, I was sure you would sympathize with me," she said softly. "It is so kind of you. I feel guilty to accept so many kindnesses from you."

"You need not," said the old detective gallantly. "The pleasure and the honor is ours."

"I shall repay you."

"We are repaid already. Do not fear. When you meet your cousin at the depot in Boston you may give him this order for the amount on our bank in New York. You may be sure it will be paid."

Dolly took the check and glanced over it critically.

Then her face was radiant.

"You are friends indeed," she said warmly. "You will give me your address and I will send you the money back as soon as I can communicate with Aunt Charlotte."

"Send the money to the bank on which this order is drawn," said Old King Brady. "It will be all right."

"I will do so. Ah, my troubles are over for just now," she said joyfully. "It is so very good of you. I think now I will retire to my stateroom for much-needed rest." She made a graceful courtesy. "I will hope to see you on the train in the morning."

"At Newport?"

Her face changed.

"Oh, no, at Fall River," she said. "I am going to Boston."

"Very well," said Old King Brady, "we will see you on the train."

She smiled bewitchingly in farewell and retired to her stateroom.

The Bradys took a seat in the saloon where they could watch the door.

"Well," said Harry slowly, "she is a bird and no mistake."

"She is very slippery."

"I never saw a better actress. Now, we have got to keep our eyes right on her or she will slip us."

"You are right."

"But she can't get off the boat until we reach Newport."

"That is true."

"Suppose, then, that we wait until we get there. I am very tired and sleepy."

"Agreed! Let us turn in."

The Bradys repaired to their own stateroom. They did not disrobe, but simply lay down with their clothes on.

When the boat whistled for Newport in the early morning hours they were quickly astir.

They went down to the gangway and stood just inside the vestibule.

A few sleepy passengers came leisurely down the stairs, presented their tickets and passed off the boat.

Suddenly the Bradys gave a start.

At the head of the stairs appeared a female figure.

It was Dolly Vane with her wraps and satchel. She came

quite leisurely down to the gangway and started to leave the boat.

As she did so, just as carelessly the Bradys stepped out before her.

"Oh, good morning, Miss Wilson," said the old detective profusely. "You are up early. You are not going ashore?"

For a moment she was disconcerted. Her eyes flashed and she seemed at a loss for words.

But only for a moment.

Then her face assumed a perfectly blank look of innocent wonderment.

"Why, of course," she said. "I am going to Boston. Aren't you?"

"Oh, yes. But we do not leave the steamer here."

She feigned confusion.

"What? Is this not Fall River?"

"Oh, no! It is Newport."

With a little gasp of wonderment she exclaimed:

"Dear me! I forgot. I was sure that Fall River was our first stop. Oh, no! What a mistake to have made. But we are not far from Fall River?"

"No, indeed."

"How fortunate. You have saved me again. I do believe that I am not fit to travel alone!"

With pretty protests and genuine dismay she accompanied the detectives back to the saloon cabin.

Here they conversed pleasantly until finally the breakfast call was given. They then went down to breakfast.

If the Bradys had disarranged the clever confidence woman's plans she did not show it by word or action.

She was delightfully jolly and bright and lively in her manner and talk.

That it had been her purpose to slip the Bradys at Newport they knew well. But she had evidently fully as good a scheme on hand.

When the boat finally reached Fall River they boarded the train together.

The Bradys now believed that they had the game won.

She would surely be met at the Boston depot by Bunco Bill.

It would be the simplest matter in the world to gather both birds in and end the case then and there. But Boston was yet far away.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HUB.

The steamboat train usually makes the run from Fall River to Boston in less than an hour and a half.

There are a number of way stations and stops.

But Dolly Vane showed no inclination to take advantage of any chance to slip her companions at any of these stops.

She grew more confidential and charming than ever as they drew nearer Boston.

"I shall go to No. — Commonwealth avenue," she said. "Maurice and his mother live there. I hope you will go there with me and allow me to make you acquainted with my Aunt Brown and my Cousin Maurice."

So straightforward was her story and so apparently sincere was she that the detectives were bewildered.

But they only smiled and at once accepted the invitation.

Even this did not seem to phase her. It was plain that Dolly believed she had a couple of easy victims in tow.

That she would eventually spring another confidence game upon them the Bradys felt sure.

In due time the train rolled into the Boston station.

Dolly and the Bradys alighted. The critical moment had come.

It was now only necessary for Maurice Brown to appear. The detectives were on the qui vive.

Dolly walked along the platform and scanned every face in the throng which surged by.

But Maurice did not appear.

Once the detectives half fancied they saw her make some kind of a signal to some one in the crowd.

But they were not sure of this.

"Where is Maurice?" she said in a perturbed way. "Dear me! I fear I have missed him."

Into the waiting room and again back to the platform they went.

But no Maurice appeared.

"It is very odd," she said petulantly. "Well, I must find my way alone to Commonwealth avenue."

"We will escort you thither," said Old King Brady.

"Oh, by no means," she protested. "Just put me in a cab. But you must call on me this evening."

"Now, as chance has it," said Harry, "we are going in that very direction. So we will all go in the same cab."

She shot a quick glance at them.

For a moment the detectives felt a fear that they had overreached.

But if she suspected them she did not say it. With a merry laugh she replied:

"Very well. The pleasure is mine. I did not hope for so much."

So Old King Brady hailed a cab and they entered it.

It is quite a long drive from the South Station to Commonwealth avenue. But Dolly enlivened the time with merry talk.

Suddenly the cabby pulled up at the number given by her.

It was a pretentious brick house with a high stoop. Dolly stepped out of the cab and said in bewitching farewell:

"This is my stopping place. Be sure and call this evening."

Then she tripped up the steps.

The Bradys were stumped.

They must either arrest her now or let her slip them for the time.

To arrest her would be only winning half the game.

Bunco Bill was the real bird they were after. He might at this moment be in the brick house before them.

But they knew that he was, if so, effectually beyond their reach. There was but one course to pursue.

The Bradys felt sure that Dolly did not suspect their identity.

She could not possibly discover that the New York bank order was really worthless until another day.

In the meantime she still believed them legitimate game. She had asked them to call in the evening.

They would wait.

They exchanged meaning glances.

"We will call this evening, Miss Wilson," said Harry, tipping his hat. "Good-by!"

The door closed behind her and she vanished into the house.

The Bradys drove away in the cab. But they did not go far.

At a near-by corner they alighted. They dismissed the cab.

"Now for business," said the old detective. "We must round up the game in the next twelve hours, Harry."

"We will."

They slipped into a dark alley and with rapid movements made a few facial changes.

When they emerged with false beards and mustaches they were completely changed in appearance.

Back they went in hot haste to the Commonwealth avenue house.

The Bradys ensconced themselves in a doorway opposite and proceeded to watch the place.

And as they now were able to size up the dwelling they saw that their first impression of it needed abridging.

The lace curtains at the windows were of cheap quality, the entrance was untidy and battered.

Old King Brady, with an impulse, approached a small fruit stand near-by.

He inquired of the dealer:

"What house is that across the way?"

The man looked up.

"You mean the swell front brick?"

"Yes."

"You're likely a stranger."

"I am."

"Any one would know that, for everybody about here knows that house to be Mrs. Langham's boarding house."

Old King Brady gave a start.

He shot a glance at Harry.

This was truly a revelation. But the fact simplified matters for the Bradys.

A boarding house, being a public place, was much easier of entrance than a private residence.

At once the detectives saw the possibility of gaining an entrance to the place.

They were not slow to decide.

"Let us go over there and make a bluff at hiring rooms,"

said Harry. "It will give us a chance to find out if Bunco Bill stops there or not."

"Good!" agreed Old King Brady. "We may see him."

"If we do——"

"He is ours."

The two detectives crossed the street. In their disguise they would hardly have been identified as the Hon. M. P. White and son who came up from New York on the Fall River Line.

They mounted the steps of the boarding house. Harry pressed the bell.

It was some while before the call was answered.

Then a woman of matronly appearance came to the door.

"Have you rooms to let, madam?" asked Old King Brady.

The woman scrutinized them.

Then, as if favorably impressed with their appearance, she smiled and replied:

"Yes. What sort of room did you want?"

"Let us look at them," said the old detective. "Is not this Mrs. Langham's house?"

"It is."

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Langham herself?"

"You have, sir. Pray walk in."

She swung the door open wider and the Bradys entered the dingy hall.

Up the stairs she led them and to a room in the front of the house. It was tawdrily furnished.

"What is the price?"

"For two?"

"Yes."

"Twenty dollars per week."

"With table board?"

"Oh, yes."

"Let us see a better one."

The woman stared. For a moment she hesitated. Then she said:

"I have a better room for twenty-five. In fact it is the best room I have in the house. But it is occupied just now."

Old King Brady caught the cue.

He flashed a glance at Harry.

"Ah!" he said doubtfully. "When do you expect it to be vacant?"

"It is occupied by a young lady who comes here regularly, but seldom stays more than three days."

"A transient guest?"

"Yes."

"And she occupies the room now?"

"She does."

"Has she been here long?"

"No; she just came to-day. She is from New York," and Mrs. Langham grew dignified. "She is a very nice young lady. She has come here so many times that we have become very great friends. She calls me auntie," and she laughed.

Old King Brady smiled.

"So you give her the best room?" he said.

"Well, it chances to be all I have vacant just now. But I would give Alice Wilson anything she wanted."

"Is she to stay long?"

"No. I believe she goes away to-morrow morning. She is going to New Hampshire to see some friends. After to-morrow the room will be vacant."

"Ah!" said Old King Brady slowly. "There is no doubt but that the room will suit us. May we look at it?"

"Certainly!"

Mrs. Langham turned and tapped lightly at a door on the right.

A feminine voice said:

"Come in!"

Mrs. Langham opened the door a trifle and said:

"Pardon me, Miss Wilson, but may I show this room to two gentlemen?"

"Why, of course."

The Bradys entered. Dolly Vane, attired in a soft blue wrapper and looking very charming, stood by one of the windows.

She glanced at the detectives in an idly curious way.

Then she resumed looking out of the window. The detectives were satisfied.

"The room is all right, Mrs. Langham," said Old King Brady. "If we decide to take it we will come around to-morrow early."

"Very well, gentlemen."

Mrs. Langham bowed them out of the house.

As the detectives descended the steps they looked up.

They saw the confidence woman at the window. But she was not looking at them.

She was gazing down the busy street in a preoccupied way. The detectives passed on up the street.

"Well," said Harry when they reached the next corner, "what do you think?"

"We are all right."

"Of course we are."

"We have only to follow the game close now to win it."

"We will keep the appointment with her to-night."

"Yes. It is likely that she still thinks we are game worth plucking."

Thus decided, the detectives started for a hotel.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN CLOSE PURSUIT.

There was a good hostelry very near at hand and the detectives proceeded thither.

Here they secured a room and also later got some dinner.

Then they resumed their make-ups of White and son and went out on the street.

They did not venture down the way of Commonwealth

avenue. It was decided to wait until evening before doing that.

But they wandered about the streets for the rest of the day in the hope that chance might enable them to run across Bunco Bill.

Chance did not so favor them, but Harry, securing an evening paper, read a bit of news.

"The mysterious bunco game played on Banker Walsh in State street last Monday is yet a puzzle to the police. They can gain no clew whatever to the rascal who was responsible for Mr. Walsh's undoing.

"But Chief Wade is of the opinion that it is the work of Bill Barton, the notorious Chicago and New York crook known as Bunco Bill.

"Barton numbers his victims by the hundred. It is said that he has operated in every big city in the country and always with success.

"The police are completely at a loss to know what to do. If it is indeed the work of Bunco Bill, there is scant chance that Mr. Walsh will ever recover his money."

"Humph!" said Harry. "It is plain that Bunco Bill is in Boston."

"That is right."

"Now it is up to us to catch him."

"If we can."

"But we must."

"We will try."

"I feel sure that Dolly will endeavor to get us in tow again to-night, and enlist his services to fleece us."

"It may be."

"If she does——"

"Woe to Bunco Bill!"

The Bradys felt quite elated and confident. They waited impatiently for the evening to come.

They supped at a small restaurant on Tremont street. Then they went for a walk on the Common.

Finally at eight o'clock they turned down into Commonwealth avenue and approached Mrs. Langham's house.

They ascended the steps.

Harry rung the bell.

Again it was a long time before the call was answered. Then Mrs. Langham appeared.

She did not recognize the detectives in their disguise. She bowed stiffly.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"We wish to see Miss Wilson," said Old King Brady.

The landlady gave a start.

"Miss Alice Wilson, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're just too late. She has this moment gone."

"Gone?" gasped both detectives, unable to disguise their consternation. "Why, how can that be? We have an appointment to meet her here to-night."

"Oh!" exclaimed the landlady with sudden thought. "Is your name White?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, Miss Wilson left a letter here for Mr. White. P'raps you're the one."

"I am," said Old King Brady eagerly. "Let me have the letter."

Mrs. Langham took the note from her pocket.

Old King Brady quickly broke the seal. He read as follows:

"Dear Friend Mr. White:

"I am suddenly called away by the illness of my sister. She is at the point of death. I hope to return very soon. Do call Thursday and again Saturday. I want to see you very much.

Yours faithfully,

"ALICE WILSON."

Old King Brady crumpled the letter.

"Mrs. Langham," he said, "are you Miss Wilson's aunt?"

"Well, she calls me auntie," replied the landlady. "But I'm no blood relation to her."

"Ah! I see. Is her cousin, Maurice Brown, stopping here?"

Mrs. Langham looked puzzled.

"I don't know any such person."

"You do not?"

"No."

"Has she an aunt by the name of Brown?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ever hear her speak of such a person?"

"No."

"Well, I want to see Miss Wilson very much. It is very important that I should get word to her at once. If I knew where she is at present I might wire her or apprise her of a very important matter."

The landlady looked blank.

"I'm sure I wish I could tell ye," she said. "I only know she got a telegram an' she started right off."

"You don't know where the telegram came from?"

"No—yes—that is," stammered the landlady. "You see, in going out she dropped it. I picked it up and jest glanced at the heading an' I see it was from Lowell."

"From Lowell?"

"Yes."

"Where is the message?"

"It's here in the letter rack, where she'll find it when she comes back."

"Pardon me, it may not seem a very regular thing to you. But when I tell you that it involves a great deal financially for Miss Wilson you will understand that it is necessary to take extreme measures. In the hope of finding out her whereabouts it is necessary for us to see that telegram."

Old King Brady spoke imperatively and forcefully.

The landlady hesitated.

"I dunno," she said. "I don't want to do anything wrong."

"Have no fear. She will say you did just right."

"So it is very important?"

"Yes, yes. We are losing time, woman. It will be too late if you delay us. Let us see the message."

Without further ado Mrs. Langham took the message from the rack and gave it to the Bradys.

Old King Brady instantly opened it and read:

"Lowell, Mass.

"To Alice Wilson:

"Meet me at depot eight fifty train. Do not fail. Bring package for Chelmsford.

Yours,

"BARTON."

The detectives had hard work to suppress their excitement. They knew well who the author of the message was.

But they kept command of themselves and Old King Brady returned the message, saying:

"All right, Mrs. Langham. We get but little clew from this, but such as it is, we will use it."

With this they hurried away from the house.

Old King Brady glanced at his watch.

"Eight-fifty!" he said. "We have ten minutes. Can we do it, Harry?"

"We will try."

Old King Brady hailed a cab. As it drew up to the pavement he said:

"Can you get us to the Northern Station in eight minutes?"

The cabby nodded slowly.

"Get us there," cried Old King Brady. "I'll give you ten dollars to get us there."

"Jump in!" cried the cabby, and he put the lash to his horse. The animal sprang forward quickly.

Over the pavements they whirled at frantic speed.

It was a good way across the city to Causeway street. The cabby took a course over Beacon Hill.

Past the State House and down one of the narrow lanes of streets fled the cab.

It was possible that the fellow might have succeeded but for an unexpected happening.

Around a corner came a lumbering dray.

The cab wheel caught it, and rip—rip—crash! Over went the vehicle. It was a wonder the Bradys were not killed.

They crawled out of the wreck unhurt. The cabby picked himself up in a dazed condition.

Old King Brady did not pause to ascertain the extent of the damage.

He thrust a note of big denomination in the cabby's hand and started away on the run, Harry after him.

Down one street and into another ran the detectives.

Now at last Causeway street lay before them. And there was the station.

They dashed into it and ran along the platform looking for the train numbers.

Agateman said in response to a query:

"Lowell train, on track 17, has just pulled out. Next train at nine o'clock."

"Whew!" gasped Harry. "Just too late."
 "Hard luck!" puffed Old King Brady.
 "I should say. It can't have been gone more than a minute."
 "It might as well have been an hour."
 "There is one recourse."
 "What?"
 "The telegraph."
 "No," said Old King Brady sharply.
 "Why not?"
 "We cannot trust to that. If Barton saw the officers at the station he would smell a rat. We might get the woman, but it's the man we want."
 "Well, you're right."
 "I think so."
 "But what is the plan?"
 "We will take the nine o'clock train for Lowell."
 "We must trust to luck after we get there."
 "Well, we shall see. That train must be ready now. We must not miss it. She has only ten minutes the start of us. Perhaps we may get her after all, if she and Barton are foolish enough to linger about the station."

"I say!"
 "What?"
 "You don't suppose that landlady is hand-in-glove with them and that she might suspect something and wire them?"
 "Pshaw! We won't borrow such trouble as that," declared Old King Brady.

The detectives boarded the nine o'clock express for Lowell. In a few minutes they were whirling away northward. Forty minutes later they alighted at the Lowell station.

They hastily made a tour of the station. But among the throng of people there was no sign of the two birds.

For an hour the Bradys made search in the vicinity. But all without result.

Finally they fell to making inquiries of cabmen.

"I think Whitey had a fare like that," said one of the cabmen, pointing to a fat, good-natured driver near. "Ask him."

The Bradys approached the driver and began to interrogate him.

"No," he declared, "I didn't take them, but I can tell you who did."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

Old King Brady pressed a five dollar bill into Whitey's hand.

"Well, who?" he asked.

"A fellow by the name of Charlie Thompson. He took the girl and a dark-complexioned man. I heard him say he had a trip to Chelmsford."

"Chelmsford?" Old King Brady remembered this name in the message.

"Yes."

"Where is Chelmsford?"

"About four miles out of the city. It is a small country town."

"Ah!" said Old King Brady. "It is very important that we find those people. How long has Thompson been gone?"

"Not over ten minutes."

"Have you got a good team?"

"Well, you bet."

"Can you catch Thompson?"

"It's likely I can if I drive hard."

"Well, twenty dollars if you overtake him."

"I'm your man," cried Whitey as he threw open the door of his carriage. "Jump in."

The detectives obeyed.

Away went the cab at full speed. It was not long before it was on a country highway.

As they were whirled along thus in the darkness the detectives sought to make deductions.

"I can't understand what has brought them up into this country," said Old King Brady.

"Nor I," agreed Harry.

"There must be some game up here. What can it be?"

"I can't imagine."

"We must catch them."

"If possible."

"It must be done."

On and on rolled the cab. The detectives could see now that they were far out in the country.

Trees were outlined against the dark sky as they looked out of the cab windows. A dim star of light shone from the distant window of a farm-house.

Suddenly the cab-driver pulled up his horses.

The cab came to a stop.

Then loud and excited voices were heard. The Bradys threw open the door.

"Is that you, Charlie?"

"Of course it is. What do you want?"

"Where is the man and woman you left the city with?"

"What's that to you? Get out of the road. I want to get home to the city."

"Well, it's a good deal to me," blustered Whitey. "I've got two chaps here as is looking for 'em."

"Is that so?"

The Bradys now rushed forward in the gloom, and Old King Brady reached the door of Thompson's carriage and threw it open.

The cab was empty.

"What are ye doing there?" demanded the surprised cabman.

"Is your name Thompson?"

"Yes."

"What have you done with the man and woman you left the city with?"

"Look here, boss, I'm an easy man but I'm no fool. I never tell tales out of school. That's for you to find out."

"Talk sense," said Old King Brady. "You've got your price."

"Yes; but I don't like trouble."

"There'll be no trouble."

"How do I know that?"

"I'll guarantee it. We've got important news for the woman and we must find her. Here's a ten dollar note. Now we want the truth."

"Pass it up!"

Thompson held the note down in the light of the carriage lamp.

Then he said:

"All right. It's a trade. I took the man and woman from the Northern Depot and I dropped them at the corner of the Dunstable road, a mile out here."

"You dropped them there?"

"Yes."

"What house?"

"No house."

"What?"

"I just left them there. It was the orders. I never ask questions. It's a good half mile from any house. They paid me and I started for home."

"Is that the truth?"

"Every word of it."

"All right. You may go on."

Thompson whipped up his horses and drove away toward Lowell. Old King Brady now turned to the other driver.

"They call you Whitey?"

"Yes."

"Well, Whitey, do you know where that corner of the Dunstable road is?"

"Yes, it's on here about a mile."

"All right! Drive us out there."

"Yes, sir."

The Bradys got into the carriage and were driven on. In a short while it came to a stop.

"The detectives got out."

"This is the place, sir," declared Whitey. "I kin see the guide-board."

"All right. You may go back to Lowell."

"What?" exclaimed the astonished cab-driver, "are you going to stop here?"

"Yes."

With a low whistle he turned his horses about and drove away. The Bradys were alone on the dark road.

For some moments the gloom was intense, but gradually their eyes became used to the light.

Then they saw indistinctly the dim figure of the guide-board and the outlines of the diverging roadway.

Old King Brady drew a dark lantern from his pocket.

"We'll see how truthful that fellow was," he said quietly.

With the rays of the lantern he began to closely examine the roadway. Their own footprints and the wheel tracks of their cab in turning were plainly to be seen.

Very carefully Old King Brady followed the road for some distance.

Suddenly he gave an exclamation:

"Have you found it?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

"Good! What is the story?"

"Their cab turned here. And here are their footprints, the man and the woman. But they go back on their course."

"Back?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Harry with gratification, "that is something. Why not trail them?"

"We will, as far as we are able."

It seemed no difficult matter to follow the footprints in the dusty highway. For a way they succeeded.

Then the tracks became suddenly indistinct. The roadway became harder and more flinty and they were lost altogether.

The Bradys kept on and searched in vain for their continuance.

The end of the trail had been reached.

The place where the trail ended was at a point where no road or path diverged, nor was there a sign of a dwelling.

All this was mystery.

What did it mean?

The detectives tried in vain to get a solution of the matter. Why had the confidence crooks adopted so singular a course?

What was their object in being thus left after dark on a lonely country highway?

"I can see only one explanation," said Old King Brady.

"What?"

"They are working a game out here somewhere, and have adopted this plan to baffle any possible trailer. It is a cunning and clever device."

"They have succeeded."

"You are right. I'll own I was never more puzzled in my life."

"They have left us not a clew."

"Only mystery."

"What kind of a game can it be that they are up to?"

"I don't know. We will find out if we take a year to do it. They must have gone somewhere from here."

"Perhaps to some one of the houses hereabouts."

"Let us do some shadowing."

The Bradys now proceeded on a risky undertaking. To go skulking about a house in the country after dark is a risky thing.

Many farmers keep savage dogs. All keep firearms and do not hesitate to fire at a suspicious skulker on their premises.

The Bradys realized this.

But they were willing to take chances. They felt sure that their birds were in some nearby house.

So they approached a rambling old farm-house which stood back from the road.

As luck had it, there was no dog, but they had hardly reached the paling of the garden fence when a dark figure loomed out of the gloom and a voice said:

"Is that you, Seth?"

"I beg pardon," said Old King Brady, "but may we ask what house this is?"

"Eh?" was the gruff reply. "Wall, it's mine, and my name is John Andrews."

"Ah, Mr. Andrews," said Old King Brady affably, "we are in a bad box. We have just come up from Boston and we are trying to overtake a young woman who is visiting up here somewhere and for whom we have important news. Do you know of such a person being seen up around here to-night?"

"What's her name?"

"Alice Wilson."

"Don't know nothin' about her. Thar's no one visitin' here."

"How about the neighbors?"

"Dunno nuthin' about my neighbors. Never bother 'em."

"It seems to me your sphere is rather limited, is it not?"

"That's my affair!"

"Right enough," agreed Old King Brady. "I can see that you're not the kind of man to afford one any more accommodation than you can help."

"This 'ere is my property, an' I don't allow no trespassin'," growled the unsociable farmer. "Ye kin keep off."

"We're not on your property, thank goodness for that," said the old detective. "This is the highway and we have as good a right here as you."

"Wall, go on about yer business or I'll git ther constable an' have ye arrested fer vagrants. I'm one of ther selectmen of this 'ere town."

"Oh, you are? Well, the town ought to be proud of you!"

Click went the gate and out came the farmer mad as a wet hen.

"Look here, if ye know what's good fer ye, ye won't give me no more sass," he said angrily. "I'm gittin' my dander up. Now, I want to know who ye are an' what yer prowling around at this time of night fer? Accordin' to law I hev a right to arrest ye on suspicion."

"I'd advise you not to try it," said Old King Brady grimly. "When the next meeting of the board of selectmen comes around you may not be in shape to attend."

"Is that a threat?"

"No, only a suggestion. We are gentlemen, and in our country of fully as much importance as you are here."

"Whar ye from?"

"That is our affair."

"Now, I'll arrest ye, anyway," snarled the self-asserted selectman. "You come along with me, both of ye. I'll take ye down to the village."

CHAPTER X.

EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS.

Mr. Andrews, selectman, reached forward and placed a hand on Old King Brady's collar.

At the same time he gave the old detective a twitch, calculated to throw him off his feet.

Instead of accomplishing his purpose he received in return a tremendous fling which sent him heels over head yards away.

He scrambled to his feet the most surprised man on earth.

"What?" he fumed. "You dare to resist arrest? You dare to assault me?"

"No, sir. I act in self-defence," said Old King Brady. "You can't arrest me, for you have no warrant."

"I arrest ye on suspicion."

"Of what?"

"Of being a suspicious character."

"I don't believe you will to-night," said the old detective contemptuously. "It will be the mistake of your life to try it."

With this the two detectives proceeded to walk away.

Mr. Andrews, selectman, emitted a shrill whistle and a yell:

"Seth! Jim! turn out, both of ye! Run over to Blaisdell's an' tell him to come over with his handcuffs. Here's a couple of roughs as we want taken care of."

A husky reply and the tramp of feet were heard.

For a moment the Bradys hesitated.

They were tempted to stand their ground and face the gang down. But they knew that it would mean a revelation of their identity which would be unpleasant to say the least.

If the report got abroad, as it would, that the Bradys were in that part of the country, the birds would get the alarm and the game be up.

"The ignorant old hard-headed fool," growled Old King Brady. "We've got to have trouble, Harry."

"We can show our stars and they'll have to let us alone."

"Bah! He wouldn't know a Secret Service badge from the moon. To be held up even a few hours now would be fatal."

"What shall we do?"

"I don't know. If this ignoramus is really a selectman he can make things hot for us."

"That is so. Why not give them the slip in the darkness?"

"We are unfamiliar with the region. They will make a hue and cry for us."

Already distant shouts were heard. The barking of dogs was also plain.

The alarm was spreading from house to house and the farmers were all turning out. The Bradys saw that there was no time to lose.

So they slipped away in the gloom.

They ran on for some while in the road and then turned into a lane.

This led them into a pine grove. A brook dashed along over pebbles.

Here the detectives paused a moment to get breath.

"They've got our track," said Old King Brady. "Hear them coming?"

"Yes."

"They are close upon us.

"How can they track us?"

"Listen!"

The deep bay of a hound sounded not far away.

This explained the matter. The dog with his unerring scent was on their trail.

"It is the dog!"

"Yes."

"He cannot be fooled. In a few moments he will find us. What shall we do?"

Harry drew his revolver.

"Let me get sight of him."

"No," said Old King Brady. "To kill him would make matters worse. I have got an idea."

"What?"

"Follow me."

The old detective waded into the brook. Harry followed him.

Down stream in the shallow water they went.

No dog can follow a water trail. When the hound reached the water he was at the end of his rope.

He was useful no longer.

The detectives ran on for some way. Finally they came to a bridge. It was a high arch and afforded them shelter.

They crept up on an overhanging shelf of rock and waited.

For hours the quest went on all around them. Hounds bayed in vain, and the pursuers crossed and re-crossed the bridge.

But not one of them ever thought of looking under it.

The Bradys were in a quandary.

They were losing time, yet they could not safely venture out. What was to be done?

There seemed no other way but to remain where they were.

This they did.

Time passed rapidly. The sounds of the quest for them finally died out altogether. Then came the first rays of the morning.

Stiff and sore, the Bradys crept out of their cramped position.

They saw the rugged outline of a hillside pasture above them. Below were slopes of woodland and the roofs of the village houses beyond.

"Well," said Harry, "here we are in daylight. I feel like going down and taking a good crack at that fool of a farmer."

"So do I," said Old King Brady. "But we would gain little by it. However, I am deuced hungry. Suppose we go down to the village tavern and get something to eat."

"All right."

The detectives gained the highway and made their way down into the town.

They saw at once that they were marked by the villagers.

But they went boldly into the tavern and ordered breakfast.

They ate heartily and then arose to take their leave. As they entered the old-fashioned tap-room three men stood by the bar. One of them was a heavy-featured, surly-looking fellow.

"Here we are," he said, glowering at the detective. "They're the chaps as sure as preaching. Now arrest 'em. Blaisdell. We'll give 'em a chance to prove a few things."

One of the trio displayed handcuffs.

Old King Brady's face flushed. He walked straight up to Andrews.

"You consummate, bigoted, ignorant ass," he declared. "Go home and take care of your cows. That is as far as your dull brain will permit you to go. Arrest me? Why, for half a mind I would put the bracelets on all of you for interfering with the execution of the law."

The constable hesitated, but Andrews cried furiously:

"Arrest him, Blaisdell! I tell ye they're both criminals. Lock 'em up!"

But Old King Brady's right hand was drawn like a whip-lash across the blatant's mouth and he went backward over a chair.

Like an infuriated lion the old detective turned upon the rural constable. He displayed his star.

"Read that, and see if it is best for you to interfere with us."

The constable stared.

"Secret Service!" he said. "You are detectives!"

"Yes," said Old King Brady, "and we are looking for a couple of crooks hereabouts. Do you think it will pay you to interfere with us?"

Blaisdell, the constable, wilted and seemed willing to sink through the floor.

"It's a mistake," he said. "Andrews, didn't know about it."

"Andrews is a fool!"

The selectman, white with fury, had now recovered himself. He was trembling with rage.

"Handcuff him, Blaisdell! Help him, you men! What are you thinking of!"

"I can't, Andrews," said the constable. "He's an officer of the law. I have no warrant to arrest him."

"Warrant!" shrieked Andrews. "Hang your warrant! Arrest him, I say! I make charge against them both."

Old King Brady stepped forward.

"What is the charge you make?" he said coldly, displaying his badge. "If you wish to interfere with my duties, do so at your peril."

Andrews stood rigid and aghast. With open mouth he gazed at the badge.

"Secret Service!" he said. "Then ye are detectives?"

"Yes."

"Why the dence didn't ye say so before. I'd never tried to arrest ye."

"We had good reasons," said Old King Brady. "But now it's out, you must give us help."

"Help?"

"Yes."

"What do ye mean?"

"We are looking for the man and woman who were brought into this town last night in a cab."

Andrews and Blaisdell both looked puzzled.

"I don't know what ye mean," said the farmer.

"Nor I," declared the constable.

"Well," said Old King Brady loudly, "a man and woman were driven some distance up the road above your house last night and left there. Now, what I want is to find out what their errand was, where they went and where they are now."

There was silence for some moments.

"Wall," said Andrews, "I can't help ye. I ain't the slightest idea about it."

"Nor I," declared Blaisdell.

The Bradys were disappointed.

They had been sure that Andrews had seen the coach as it passed his house. But the selectman was positive.

He had not seen it.

But just at that moment a man at the lower end of the tap-room spoke up.

"I reckon I kin give ye a pointer on that," he said.

All eyes were turned upon him.

"Rube Fox," said Andrews. "Let's have it, Rube."

"Wall," said the fellow slowly, "as nigh as I kin make out it's the same parties who made a call on old Squire Switzer last night."

"Squire Switzer?" said Old King Brady eagerly. "Who is he?"

"Wall, he's about the biggest miser in this 'ere town."

"And one of our richest men," put in Andrews.

"Yas; he's got loads of money."

"Just so!" agreed the detective. "You say they called on him?"

"Yas. I was up that way——"

"Callin' on Liz Wade, I reckon," snickered Blaisdell. "We're all onto ye, Rube."

"Wall, thar ain't nothin' out with Liz," said Andrews, "if she does work for old Switzer."

"Who sed there wuz?"

"All right. Go ahead, Reuben," said Old King Brady persuasively. "It is possible the man and woman are visiting Switzer, aren't they?"

"Well, if they wuz, they didn't stay long."

The Bradys gave a start.

"Are they not there now?"

"I reckon not."

"Where did they go?"

"I dunno, but I reckon they took an early train. An' old Switzer's gone with 'em, too. Liz' is stayin' with mother till they come back."

CHAPTER XI.

A HARD GAME.

To the Bradys this was a most astonishing revelation, as well as a puzzling state of affairs.

For a moment there was silence. This was broken by Andrews.

"Gol durn it, Rube," he said, "why don't ye give yer 'pinyun?"

"What 'pinyun?" asked Rube.

"As ter who they were an' what old Switzer went away with 'em fer."

Rube scratched his head.

"In course I dunno," he said. "But Liz told me her idea of it all."

"Look here," said Old King Brady. "Let us have the story and I'll give you money enough to buy Liz a new gown."

With which the old detective passed a bank note into the rustic's hand.

Rube colored and coughed. Then he said slowly:

"Ye want me ter tell what Liz told me?"

"Yes."

"Wall, if ye won't say anything to her that I told ye, I will."

"We promise," said old King Brady impatiently.

"All right then. Wall, Liz told me that she thought Switzer was makin' a fool of himself. Ye see he answered one of these 'ere advertisements of a rich woman wantin' a husband.

"He got an answer an' a fotygraph in the mail. He was stuck on the fotygraph an' answered the letter. The woman said she'd marry him if he'd merge his fortune with hers and make one solid block of it.

"Wall, now, you bet it looked all right—to old Switzer. He was gettin' a wife an' a pooty one, an' a fortune, too. So he agreed to it.

"Last night I was callin' on Liz when the woman came with her lawyer. Me an' Liz was interested, so we kinder listened. We heerd the hull bargain."

Rube paused to shift his quid of tobacco.

The Bradys exchanged glances.

They saw the whole game.

But they felt little sympathy for Switzer, regarding him as only another species of fool.

"All right," said Old King Brady, "what did you hear?"

"Durn me, I heerd it all. There was a great argument about the settlement. The woman said she'd marry him if he'd draw ten thousand dollars from his bank an' she'd deposit it with ten thousand of hers in her bank an' hold the bank-book as a guarantee of good faith.

"At first old Switzer wouldn't do it, but she made love to him so fine that he came down an' agreed.

"They agreed ter take the morning train ter Boston an' fix everything up. Then she would marry him an' come

(Continued on page 23.)

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(Continued from page 21.)

home ter live. But they won't find Liz thar, fer she's goin' ter stay with mother. She said she wouldn't work fer such a brazen thing as ther new wife would be."

Old King Brady drew a deep breath.

"And they went away on the morning train?"

"Yas."

"You don't know where they were to go in Boston?"

"To the bank first off."

"Do you know what bank Switzer patronizes in Boston?"

"No."

"I do," said Andrews. "He writes checks on the Maverick Bank."

"An' ther Blackstone National, too," declared Blaisdell.

Old King Brady looked at his watch. It was quarter of twelve.

"When does the next train go to Boston?" he asked.

"At twelve o'clock."

"All right. We are very anxious to see Mr. Switzer before he is married. We will take that train. Perhaps we may find him at the bank."

Andrews and Blaisdell followed the Bradys out doors.

They were morbidly curious.

"I say," said Andrews, "it ain't no gold brick game, is it? I reckon old Switzer is pooty sharp."

"Well, he's not sharp enough for that pair," said Old King Brady. "And you may set that down."

"What if he comes back——"

"If the man and woman come back arrest and hold them for us."

"I'll do it," avowed Andrews. "Won't we, Blaisdell?"

"You bet!"

"Ye don't want us ter go to Boston with ye an' help ye?"

"No," replied Old King Brady, "you can help us better right here."

"Wall, we'll do it."

The Bradys wasted no more time in useless parley.

They started away post haste for the depot.

They had just time to catch the train. An hour later they were in Boston.

They realized the need of rapid action. It was certainly hard luck which had led them astray the previous night and prevented their reaching Switzer's.

If they had hit upon his house they would have bagged the game.

Their first move was to go to the Maverick Bank.

Old King Brady made himself known to the cashier.

Then he stated his errand.

"Why, yes," said the cashier. "Mr. Switzer came in here this morning and drew five thousand dollars from his funds on deposit here."

"Was anybody with him?"

"No."

"He did not state what use he was going to make with the money?"

"Well, yes, he did."

"Ah—what?"

"He was in a very jovial frame of mind and said he intended to devote the money to a bridal tour."

Old King Brady smiled grimly.

"Did you think there was anything odd about that?"

"No."

"Well," said the old detective, "I am very fearful for Mr. Switzer. He is in bad hands."

"Oh, he is?"

"Yes; there is every reason to believe that he is the victim of a bunco game."

The cashier brought his hand down forcibly on the desk.

"Do you know, that came to me when I let him have the money," he said. "But I did not say anything, for I know Switzer to be a very sharp man, and ordinarily able to take care of himself."

"In dealing with a man doubtless he would. But there is a woman in the case."

"The old story," said the cashier.

"Yes. Can you tell me where he would be likely to stay in the city?"

"Usually at the United States Hotel. But I am not sure."

The two detectives took their leave. They went at once to the Blackstone Bank. The cashier replied:

"Yes, sir. Mr. Switzer was here early in the day and drew five thousand dollars from his funds."

The Bradys gasped.

"There is the ten thousand," said Harry. "It is gone before this."

"There is no doubt."

Leaving the Blackstone Bank the detectives went at once to the United States Hotel.

The clerk looked over the register.

"No," he declared. "No such party is here."

The detectives were befogged.

They knew that Switzer was somewhere in Boston with his new-found friends. To find them was the game.

And it was not an easy one.

From one hotel to another the detectives went.

But not a clew was found.

Mr. Switzer and his bride-to-be, with the lawyer, had disappeared effectually.

"They've got his money by this time," said Harry. "I don't see how we can do anything to save him."

"No, but we must get the confidence people."

"That's right."

"Now I have an idea."

"Well?"

"Switzer won't give up that money unless he is assured that he has got a return for it."

"Probably not."

"From all accounts he is a sharp old chap."

"I daresay."

"Now, their game may be to decoy him to some out-of-the-way place and either drug or sand-bag him."

"Poor old fool!"

"That's so. But it don't help us to catch the schemer. What can we do? I believe we're out of luck."

"You don't suppose they would take him to Mrs. Langham's?"

Old King Brady gave a start.

"On my word!" he exclaimed, "I'm glad you mentioned that, Harry."

"It may be of no value."

"And yet it may be the truth. Let us run down there at once."

All day long the Bradys had been searching the city. It was now evening.

Lights were burning in Mrs. Langham's windows when they ascended the steps. They pulled the bell.

Mrs. Langham came to the door.

She did not recognize the Bradys in their present guise. They bowed and Harry said:

"Madam, has Miss Wilson returned?"

"Do you want to see her?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think she has callers. She was in the private reception room with two gentlemen a short while ago. Will you step in and wait?"

The Bradys entered.

"Mrs. Langham," said Old King Brady, "do not disturb them. But show me the way to the reception room. Don't fear," he said, as she hesitated. "It is all right. She expects us."

"I hope it is all right."

"It is, you may be sure. You are sure she is in the reception room?"

"She went in there with two gentlemen callers not more than thirty minutes ago," was the reply.

"You did not see her come out?"

"No."

"Then she is likely there yet?"

"I think so. I see the door is closed."

Mrs. Langham stood aside and the Bradys rapped on the door lightly. There was no reply.

All was silent beyond the door. The Bradys began to feel doubt. Could it be that the slippery couple had again given them the slip?

Old King Brady lifted the latch and pushed the door open.

The reception room seemed deserted. A lamp burned dimly on the table.

But, as Old King Brady turned up the wick, a startled exclamation escaped him.

"Too late!" he cried. "The game has been played."

CHAPTER XII.

IN PURSUIT.

On a sofa lay the recumbent figure of a man.

Inert and lifeless he appeared. The detectives bent over him.

It was Farmer Switzer.

His pockets had been turned inside out, an empty satchel lay on the floor, and the odor of a drug filled the air.

Old King Brady took one look at the drugged man.

Then he turned and cried:

"Bring cold water quick. This man is drugged!"

"Mercy sakes!" screamed Mrs. Langham. "What is the matter? Is he dead?"

"No," replied Old King Brady. "But he must be brought out of the drug."

"What does it mean? Who drugged him?"

"Your very fine protege, Miss Wilson and her pal, the notorious Bunco Bill."

Mrs. Langham looked like fainting, but Old King Brady induced her to recover long enough to get water.

Then he went to work on Switzer.

It was not long before the detectives had brought him back to consciousness. He looked about him stupidly.

"What's this—whar am I? What's the matter?" he asked brokenly.

"Clear your brain a little," said Old King Brady. "Then you can realize what a fool you have been."

These words seemed to revive Switzer at once.

He blinked and stared at Old King Brady.

Then he rose upon his elbow.

"Who are ye?" he demanded.

"I am a Secret Service detective."

"A detective?"

"Yes."

"What do you want of me?"

"Mighty little, but I'll be obliged if you'll tell us all about the man and woman who decoyed you here."

"Decoyed me?" gasped Switzer. "Why, I came here with the woman who is to be my wife."

"Well, you are an easy sucker. Do you know that your money is gone?"

"Money?" said Switzer confusedly.

"Didn't you draw ten thousand dollars from the bank?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

Slowly the truth began to dawn upon the farmer. He blinked and gasped.

"Where is she? Where is my betrothed wife?" he demanded. "She has the money. Oh, how my head aches. Say, have I been sick or am I dreaming?"

"Oh, no," replied Old King Brady. "You have only been the victim of knockout drops."

"Knockout drops?" gasped Switzer in distress. "Ye don't mean to tell me that I—er——"

"Yes, that's it. You've made a fool of yourself."

"Where are they?"

"That is what we would like to know."

It was a long while before the puzzled farmer could bring himself to accept the true state of affairs.

Then he was quite broken in nerves and wept like a child.

"My hard-earned money is gone," he moaned. "What a fool I've been. They jest made a fool of me."

"You've one consolation," declared Old King Brady. "You're not the only one."

"Why, I can't believe it," said Mrs. Langham in stupefaction. "I never dreamed that Miss Wilson was crooked."

"Well, you see for yourself," said Harry. "Her name is not Wilson."

"Not Wilson?"

"No, she is Dolly Vane, the noted female confidence woman. The man is Bunco Bill, the king of crooks."

"The cleverest crook in New York," said Old King Brady.

"We will leave this victim of misplaced confidence in your care, Mrs. Langham," said Harry. "It will be some hours before he is able to move much. But he is rich and can pay you."

"All right, gentlemen. If Miss Wilson returns I will deny her the house."

"If she returns, hold her at all costs," said Old King Brady. "Get an officer and arrest her."

"I will do so."

With this the detectives left the house. Once again the game had slipped them by a narrow margin.

"We're always just too late," said Harry in discomfiture.

"Oh, well, one of these times we shall be in good season," said Old King Brady. "Perseverance wins the battle."

"All right. We will not give up. But where shall we look for them now?"

"I believe they will go back to New York."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think that?"

"I have a fancy that will be their course. That is all."

"Then our best course is to go right back to Gotham."

"I believe so."

"Do you think they went by steamer?"

"They may not have started yet. They are but an hour or so ahead of us. They may be right here in Boston at this very moment."

"How shall we determine that?"

"Only by the hardest of work or the best of luck."

"At least we may be able to intercept them."

"Just so."

The Bradys lost no time.

They went to the steamer offices and examined the lists. But no names likely to have been assumed by the two crooks were found.

Moreover, the steamboat trains had already departed. There would be no more for twenty-four hours.

Also the Bradys went to the Pullman offices and examined the berth lists. Trains left at various hours until midnight.

These lists were not yet completed. Every moment fresh applicants came.

The Bradys watched until midnight was past and the last train had gone.

But the crooks did not appear.

"Then they have remained in Boston," said Harry.

"Or gone to some other city."

"Exactly."

"I have an idea."

"Well?"

"Let us look up the lists for Albany. They may have gone that way."

"To New York via the Hudson?"

"Yes."

"Good! It may be so."

Almost at once the berth clerk of the Albany train said:

"Oh, yes. I sold two berths for Albany on the sleeper Vanity Fair. They had tickets for New York over the Hudson River railroad."

"A man and woman?"

"Oh, yes."

"Their names?"

The clerk studied the list. Finally he said:

"Here they are: Mr. Maurice Brown of Boston, and Miss Alice Wilson. They wired ahead for staterooms on the Empire State Express."

"Has that left Albany?"

The clerk glanced at the clock.

"It is just rolling into New York," he said. "You are too late."

The Bradys were chagrined.

Ill luck attended them on every hand. It seemed almost as if fate was against them.

"We can't go on to-night," said Harry. "Let's go to a hotel and have some sleep."

"All right."

The Bradys went to the Parker House and turned in. Nothing could be done until the morrow.

A telegram to the New York police would be too late to avail in intercepting the crooks.

There was no way but to wait for the morrow.

The Bradys were then resolved to shake the dust of Boston off their feet. Success had not waited on them in the city of culture and beans.

"I believe we'll have better luck in good old New York town," said Harry. "At least that is where our game is."

"You are right."

The detectives were very tired and slept soundly.

But they were early astir. Going down to breakfast they heard the morning papers hawked in the streets.

"All about the man who was buncoed and lost ten thousand dollars."

This was the cry.

The paper had a detailed account of the bunco game played so skilfully on poor Farmer Switzer.

He had returned home on the morning train a sadder but wiser man.

It was safe to say that he took no more pains to advertise for a wife.

The Bradys took the early morning express for New York. In less than seven hours they once more trod the pavements of New York.

It was a real joy to do this. While they admired Boston,

they were better content to follow the trail up in the big city of New York, which was a more familiar stamping ground.

But once more they found themselves groping in the dark.

They had not even the slightest kind of a clew to guide them.

For days they had been pursuing the most elusive kind of a will-o'-the-wisp.

It had been a profitable trip for Bunco Bill and his female pal.

They had brought back Farmer Switzer's ten thousand dollars, as well as other small jobs.

At this rate the two crooks would be getting rich.

It was possible that, surfeited with money, they might take a notion at any time to leave the country.

Harry advanced this idea, but Old King Brady shook his head.

"I don't think it," he said. "They are natural criminals. Bunco Bill follows his game for the love of it. He will never give it up."

"But he is bound to be caught sooner or later."

"That is true. But that is the chance he is taking."

The Bradys spent two days in a blind quest.

"I tell you what," said Harry, "I don't think we'd better let any chance slip hereafter."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if we come across either one of them arrest that one."

"All right," agreed Old King Brady. "We are more likely to come upon Dolly. If we do we will nab her."

"And trust to luck in getting Barton?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

The Bradys finally concluded to pay a visit to headquarters. They went down and called on the chief.

"Hello!" he cried. "I am glad to see you. I hope you bring good news."

"Not a bit of it."

"We've been beaten badly," said Old King Brady. "That Bunco Bill is the slipperiest fellow I ever saw."

"Tell me all about it," said the chief with interest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PAINTED DIAMONDS.

The Bradys recited their experiences in Boston, and the details of the bunco game played on Farmer Switzer.

The chief listened with interest.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, "they are all-round workers. aren't they?"

"I tell you Bunco Bill is the cleverest crook in New York."

"Oh, that is unquestioned."

"But we mean to beat him."

"You will?"

"If we don't he will be the first to fool us."

"I have confidence that you will do it," said the chief.

"This woman is as slick as he is."

"You are right. They fooled old Switzer well."

"They are now in New York."

"We trailed them here."

"Well, I hope you will get them. Hello! What's this?"

"Ting—a-ling—ling."

The telephone bell on the chief's desk rang sharply. He took up the receiver.

"Well?" he asked.

"Is this the office of the Chief of the Secret Service?" was asked.

"Yes."

"Is the chief there?"

"I am the chief."

"Well, this is the private office of Tiffany & Co. We want you to send two good men up here at once."

"What is the case?"

"An attempted diamond swindle. A female crook, or we assume her to be such, has offered us diamonds to the value of fifty thousand dollars. But we find that they are painted stones."

"Painted stones?"

"Yes. You see it is possible, by means of a certain chemical, to brush over paste gems and make them look like the finest of stones. They may deceive an expert. They will also stand every test but alcohol."

"That is quite wonderful."

"Yes, indeed. We have tested these gems with alcohol and they are painted."

"Then you want to arrest the woman?"

"Yes."

"Is she there at present?"

"No. She promised to return this afternoon and get the gems or a check for their value, as we might decide."

"I see. Very well, I will send you two men at once."

The chief closed the receiver. The Bradys had heard every word. At once Old King Brady was excited.

The chief was about to send for two other detectives. But Old King Brady said:

"Wait a moment. We will take that case."

"You?" exclaimed the chief.

"Yes."

"But—you have your hands full with Bunco Bill."

"Ah, but I believe this woman with the painted diamonds is Dolly Vane."

The chief was startled.

"Do you believe it?"

"I do."

"Well, that is a possibility. I did not think of that."

"At any rate," said Old King Brady, "let us take the case. If we are wrong it will be easy to detail two other men on the case."

"That is true," declared the chief. "I defer to your wishes. But you had better go up to Tiffany's at once."

"We will do so."

A few moments later the Bradys were on their way up-town.

They entered Tiffany's store some while later. At once they were shown into the private office.

The head of the firm met them and said:

"Yes; it is a clever attempt at a swindle. I will show you the diamonds."

And he brought out a tray. A number of magnificent stones lay on the black velvet cloth.

"Are they not beauties?" asked the expert. "Now let me show you."

With a brush dipped in alcohol he touched one of the stones. The result was most astonishing.

Its facets ceased to glitter. It lay on the cloth only a dull, sightless bit of cheap glass.

"There you are," said the expert triumphantly. "Can anything be clearer?"

"It looks as if the woman meant to defraud you."

"Just so."

"She has made herself liable to certain prosecution."

"Exactly."

"And you wish to prosecute her?"

"Certainly. Something must be done about it. We must have protection."

"You are right. When she returns we will arrest her."

Just at that moment there came a light rap on the door of the private office. The expert arose and opened the door.

The office boy stood there with a card in his hand.

"A caller, sir," he said.

The expert took the card and then passed it to the Bradys.

The detectives read the name:

"Mrs. W. H. Florence, Fifth Avenue."

"It is our woman," said the expert. "Now what do you advise?"

"That is for you to decide."

The diamond expert reflected a moment. Then he said to the boy:

"Show her in here."

The boy departed.

"Now, gentlemen," said the expert, excitedly, "ensconce yourselves behind this screen and listen. I shall interrogate her closely and then denounce her as a fraud. You can do the rest."

"All right."

The Bradys stepped behind a screen in the corner of the room.

The next moment the door opened. A woman entered.

The Bradys, peering through a crack in the screen, gave a start.

They recognized her at once. She was, as they had at first suspected, no other than Dolly Vane.

"At last!" whispered Harry.

Dolly made a graceful bow and dropped into a chair.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Florence," said the expert politely. "I did not expect you quite so early."

"Then you have reached no decision in regard to the stones?" she asked.

"Well, yes," replied the expert. "I may say that I have."

A curious light burned in the female crook's eyes.

"You have decided to take them?" she asked softly.

"I have decided to keep them," said the expert quietly.

"Of course it is hard for me to part with my treasure.

But you have promised me the privilege of redemption within a reasonable limit of time."

"I hardly think you will care to redeem them."

Her face changed.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't think you will raise the fifty thousand to redeem them."

She affected hauteur.

"To be sure my resources are at present low, or I would not offer them for sale."

"You have my sympathy."

She made a movement to rise.

"My time is limited," she said. "If you have decided to keep the stones I shall be grateful for a check."

"Pray keep your seat, madam," said the expert. "I wish to have a little talk with you before I give you the check."

She sat back. There was a wondering light in her eyes.

The expert opened a drawer in his desk and took out one of the stones. He exposed it in the palm of his hand.

"It is a beautiful gem," he said.

"Yes," she agreed.

"You feel bad to part with it?"

"I do."

"Too bad! Perhaps you will part with it the more easily after I have done this to it."

With a quick movement the expert took up his alcohol brush and touched the blazing jewel.

Its fire faded.

It lay a cheap bit of glass in his hand. For an instant deathly pallor was in the woman's face.

She gasped and stared at the stone. The expert's eyes were fixed upon her. But only for an instant was Mrs. Florence disconcerted.

Then she exclaimed:

"What? It is a bogus diamond?"

"Yes, and so are all of them."

"My God!" she exclaimed. "What does it mean? I have always deemed them genuine. I paid a fortune for them in Paris, and——"

"One moment, my dear madam. How can you assure me that you have not brought these painted stones here to defraud us of fifty thousand dollars?"

He looked accusingly at her. Only wonderment, distress and denial were depicted in her face.

"No, no!" she cried. "That is not so. You do not think that of me. Give me the stones. I have been fearfully deceived."

She arose and started to the door.

But the expert held up his hand.

"You cannot go," he said.

"Why?"

"The door is locked."

She turned upon him in a hunted way.

"You do not believe me guilty?" she demanded in distress. "I swear that I did not know the stones were false. Oh, God! do not arrest me! Have mercy on an unfortunate woman."

"Pray do not waste your breath in useless denial," said the expert sternly. "I cannot show mercy to a criminal of your class."

"A criminal? How dare you!"

"It is a known fact that you are Dolly Vane, the confidence woman."

"It is a lie!" she screamed.

"I will prove it."

He snapped his fingers.

The Bradys stepped out from behind the screen. The tableau was a most thrilling one.

For one moment Dolly Vane stood white as marble and a human statue.

Her dilated eyes were fixed with a fearful intensity upon the detectives.

"The game is up, Dolly," said Old King Brady. "We followed you a good way in your travels to Boston and beyond. We have a full record of your deal with old Farmer Switzer."

Something like a hiss escaped her lips.

One hand stole to her bosom. Just in time Old King Brady caught the gleam of steel.

Then he sprang forward.

It was his thought that the desperate woman would suicide. But her hand came out with a tiny revolver clasped in it.

Crack!

The flash and report was full in the detective's face.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

Old King Brady, the detective, never had a closer call. An inch nearer and the aim would have been fatal. •

The bullet grazed his cheek and lodged in the partition beyond.

But in the same instant he had seized her arm and the next moment she was disarmed.

"Not so fast, my fine woman," cried the detective, as he forced her into a chair. "Your game is done."

And so it was.

A few moments later Dolly Vane was in a carriage on her way to the Tombs.

Bunco Bill's female pal had reached the end of her rope.

Part of the game was won. But the cleverest crook in New York was still at large.

In vain effort was made to keep the affair out of the papers.

The reporters got hold of it and the newspapers had a full account of the arrest of the female crook who had tried to swindle Tiffany out of fifty thousand dollars.

"All right," said Old King Brady, grimly. "I suppose Barton will take the alarm and get out of the country."

But this did not happen.

The Bunco King was not heard from again for some weeks. Then the Bradys received a curious letter.

Thus it read:

"To the Two Bradys:

"Maybe you think you can catch Bill Barton as easy as you did the poor defenceless woman. It's easy enough to fool a petticoat, but you smart detectives can't tackle a man. Now I give you fair warning that I mean to avenge my pal. I'm on your track and I mean to do you up.

"Yours for death,

BUNCO BILL."

The Bradys at first were disposed to regard this message as a hoax. But an after event convinced them that it was a genuine warning.

The Bunco King was in earnest. Filled with rage at the arrest of his pal, he meant to wipe the Bradys out.

"All right," declared Old King Brady. "I hope he'll try it. Nothing could be better. He will overreach himself and we will nip him short."

"That's right," agreed Harry.

The next day the Bradys became conscious of a startling fact.

Their footsteps were being dogged. Some unseen being was tracking them.

This became apparent to them in many ways.

They could not get sight of the unknown trailer.

But they felt his presence and knew that he was shrewd and clever. Their best efforts to get sight of him were in vain.

Of course the Bradys knew what to do.

They employed the greatest of caution and kept on the alert.

They knew that sooner or later an opportunity would offer itself to turn the tables.

This was what they wanted.

It is not a comfortable feeling to know that one is dogged by a secret assassin.

The two detectives were men of great bravery. But despite their nerve they felt the strain.

"I tell you one thing," said Old King Brady finally, "I'm going to nip that rascal or lose my scalp."

"How?" asked Harry.

"I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"We have not yet got sight of the skulking rascal. Now I propose that we start out this evening for a walk. We will not go together, but separately.

"I believe it is the villain's plan to drop on either one of us singly and in some dark place. I'll give him a chance."

"I have a better plan."

"Well?"

"You may start out ahead of me. I will come along behind, and perhaps we can get the rascal between us."

"I hope so."

"It is certainly unpleasant to know that wherever you go you are dogged by a secret foe."

"That is true."

The detectives now proceeded to put this plan into operation.

That evening they dined at the Plaza Hotel, which is near the entrance to Central Park.

They sat in the smoking room for some while and then Old King Brady said:

"I am going into the park. I shall stroll slowly down the Mall. You can come along behind me in ten minutes. If my shadow is around here now he will be close behind me, and we ought to get him between us in that way."

"Yes."

"Then I shall turn into some dark path. You must be clever enough to get in behind him. Of course he will turn in behind me. Then I will turn about and we will nab him."

"Good!"

"It is understood?"

"Yes."

"There is a fellow at the hotel entrance whom I suspect. But he may not be the man."

"Does he resemble Barton?"

"No. But that is not necessary. I think Bunco Bill has accomplices."

"Very good! The man between us when you turn into a dark path must be our man."

"Just so."

"All right. Go ahead."

Old King Brady strolled out of the hotel and crossed the square. He leisurely walked into the park.

He did not look behind him.

Indeed, if he had he could hardly have hoped to identify his shadow, for there were many people in his rear.

But he kept on until finally he reached the Mall.

Here he sauntered along very leisurely so as to give Harry a chance to catch up with him.

Satisfied finally that sufficient time had elapsed, he crossed the terrace and passed the lake.

Just beyond this there is a region of rocky cuts and trees. It is a lonely locality filled with shadows.

By-paths turn every way. Into one of these Old King Brady turned.

And as he did so his trained ear caught a distant crunching footstep. He knew the shadow was behind him.

It was a thrilling moment.

To know that one is in a dark, unfrequented spot with an assassin close behind one is not conducive to a cheerful spirit.

Old King Brady's every nerve was at its most intense pitch.

Suddenly he turned sharp about and passed the other way. A dark shadow flitted behind a tree. The detective halted. He knew death lurked in that shadowy spot.

He hesitated to pass it. But the next moment there was a rush and a thud and a voice cried:

"Come on, partner. I have him."

The sounds of a struggle rose on the night air.

Harry was engaged in a deadly struggle with a powerful man in the shrubbery. Old King Brady rushed to his aid.

The two detectives dragged him out into the path. A knife gleamed in his hand.

But Harry held his wrist.

"Trip him," breathed the young detective. "Get him down."

Old King Brady kicked the fellow's feet out from under him and he fell with a crash.

Thus far he had not uttered a word. Now curses broke from his lips in the Italian tongue.

The sounds of the struggle had traveled far on the night air.

The distant shrill note of a park officer's whistle was heard and he came flying to the spot.

Others came also.

The Bradys had their man helpless on the walk. As the officers came up they flashed a lantern upon the scene.

"What is this?" cried the sergeant, who was the first on hand. "What's going on here?"

"We were followed by this cowardly assassin," declared Old King Brady. "He attacked us with a knife."

"Per Dio. It eas one lie. Mea honest man," protested the brute. And such he was.

Broad and thick-set, he was a man of powerful physique. His features were heavy and brutish.

The sergeant flashed a lantern in his face.

"Hello!" he cried. "It's Black Peter. Here is a catch. Gentlemen, you have got hold of the worst man in New York."

"Black Peter!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "I thought he was deported to Italy years ago."

"He has got into the country again in some way," said the sergeant. "But we shall give him a taste of American justice now."

Handcuffs were placed on the Italian ruffian, who was known as Giovanni Vespuccio, one of the worst ruffians and murderers that ever landed on the free shores of America.

The ban of his own land was upon him and he was an outlaw in every European country.

He had once been a brigand in the mountains of Italy and such a monster in crime that even his own men had turned and driven him out.

Vespuccio was known to be guilty of a score of murders. No wonder that the police sergeant was glad to get hold of him.

"You did well to handle him, gentlemen," said the sergeant. "Had he attacked you?"

"No," replied Old King Brady, "but he has been long on my track and we laid a trap for him."

"Your names, please?"

Harry showed his star and Old King Brady did the same. The sergeant was astonished.

"Secret Service!" he gasped.

"Yes."

"And this brute was on your trail?"

"He was. I think he was hired to assassinate us by Bill Barton."

"Bunco Bill?"

"Yes."

"Will wonders never cease? You are lucky to escape him. Are there others still on your track?"

"We think so."

"Well, gentlemen," said the sergeant, "we will take this wretch to the Tombs."

"Do so," said Old King Brady. "And keep this affair quiet. We hope yet to nip Bunco Bill himself."

"I hope you may do so."

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH IS THE LAST.

A patrol wagon arrived and Vespuccio was taken away. He made no effort to resist.

The Bradys now returned to Fifth avenue and the Plaza. They did not believe that Vespuccio had confederates, or at least they were not on hand.

"Barton keeps good company, don't he?" said Harry.

"Well, I should say so."

"It shows one thing."

"What?"

"He frequents the slums, else he could not have met this ruffian."

"You are right."

This caused the Bradys some speculation. The plan suggested itself to them to take a tour through Little Italy.

But the next morning a messenger came hot haste to their lodgings.

He was a Tombs messenger.

"The prisoner Vespuccio wants to see you," he said. "He has a confession to make. Come quick."

The Bradys wasted no time.

They leaped into a cab.

A short while later they entered the Tombs. They were at once taken to the cell of Vespuccio.

The Italian monster was pacing his cell like an encaged lion.

At sight of the detectives his brutish face lit up.

"Ah, youa come to seea da poor Italiano," he said. "Da is noa chance. I musta die. Vespuccio knowa dat. He aska no mercy. He ready toa die."

"I hope you will die repentant of your sins," said Old King Brady.

The brigand crossed himself.

"Ah, signor, I havea been bada man. But I paya for dat."

"What do you want to say to me?"

Trembling as with the palsy the wretch looked up into the old detective's face.

The light of utter despair in his bleary eyes was something hideous to look upon.

"Youa tella me da is no hope for Vespuccio? He tella youa where to catcha da Signor Barton youa speaka da good word for Vespuccio?"

"Giovanni," said the old detective forcefully, "it would be of no use. I could not save you from your fate."

The wretch groaned and trembled. Then he said:

"Wella, youa do whata youa can?"

"Yes."

"Then mea tella you all. He slippery man, da Signor Barton. He tella he paya me big mon' to killa you. I trya to do it, youa know."

"Yes, I know."

"Vespuccio musta die. Noa help. He tella da truth. Youa finda Signor Barton at Vanelli's. Youa knowa da place in Mulberry street?"

"Vanelli's? He is a liquor seller."

"Ya, data place. Youa see, he lovea da Bianca, da Vanelli's daughter. He keepa da place mosta time. Find him dere to-night."

The two detectives exchanged glances.

There was a momentary thought of a trap.

But Vespuccio put up his hand.

"I swear it," he said solemnly. "By da Virgin, by da Jesu! I tella da truth, no havea da fear. Go da and finda him to-night."

He would deign no further conversation with the Bradys and they took their leave.

When they reached the street Harry said:

"What do you think, partner?"

"I am mystified. I can hardly trust that fiend."

"I'll tell you."

"What?"

"We might take a look about Vanelli's. If there is a trap we ought to be able to tell."

The Bradys turned their steps in the direction of the Italian quarter.

It was not long before they were in Mulberry street.

It was a difficult matter to find Vanelli's place.

It was a bar-room of quite a pretentious kind for the neighborhood. The most vicious type of Italians lounged about the place.

The Bradys shadowed the place for some while. It was almost evening when they saw a man of medium height come along the street.

He was not an Italian.

He walked with a jaunty step. Just then a window opened in the second story.

At the window stood an Italian girl.

She was of a coarse type of beauty. Her face lit up at

sight of the man. She made a slight signal and withdrew from the window.

Then the man, saluting the crowd of Italian loungers, passed into the saloon.

The detectives turned to each other.

"That is our man."

"It is Bunco Bill."

"He is in Vanelli's place now. We have run him to his lair."

With this certainty established a question arose.

How were they to capture the bird?

"There is only one way."

"What?"

"We must surround the place with police. There must be no avenue of escape left open."

"All right."

"You stay here and guard the place. I will bring a squad of officers."

Old King Brady started for the next call-box.

He met a patrolman and told him of the situation.

"I want twenty-five men," he said. "More if possible."

"I will call up headquarters," said the officer. "You can get a hundred if needed. I tell you it is a tough place in which to make an arrest."

The officer rang the call.

The reply came that the officers were on the way. Soon they came filing down into Mulberry street.

The appearance of the squad made some excitement. The Italians began to jabber and swarm about.

But the officers quickly surrounded Vanelli's place.

The Bradys led the way into the dive. They were met with the protests of Vanelli.

"Da is noa such a man here," he protested. "It alla big lie. My daughter noa havea lover!"

The place was ransacked from cellar to attic.

Bianca was furious. She flew at the Bradys to tear their eyes out.

"Youa insulta Italian girl," she screamed. "I havea your heart's blood for dat."

"Oh, no!" said Old King Brady. "I'll put you where you can do no harm. Take her to the Tombs, officer."

The whole Vanelli tribe were put under arrest.

But it did no good.

Not a trace of Bunco Bill could be found. He had again given the Bradys the slip.

But just as the officers were leaving the place a street urchin came up to Old King Brady and plucked his sleeve.

"Do ye wanter know where de bloke is dat comes around yere to see the Eyetalian gal?"

"Do you know where he is?"

"You bet I know where he's gone, boss. He took a sneak out de back way an' started fer Broadway with a couple of his pals. He's makin' fer his boardin' house up in Union Square."

"Do you know where that is?" asked Old King Brady eagerly.

"You bet I does."

"You come with us."

The Bradys took the newsboy on an uptown Broadway car. He seemed to be a bright little fellow and gave his name as Pete Norris.

"You bet I knows Bunco Bill," he said. "I've seen him many a time. I never dared peach on him afore, though."

Up-town rolled the car. Finally it entered Union Square.

Suddenly Pete started up, saying:

"Dere dey is, boss."

A glance satisfied the Bradys. Three men were hastily crossing the square. In another moment the Bradys were off the car.

They recognized Bunco Bill and two confederates. They were crossing the square near the Washington statue. The Bradys kept the statue between them and rushed to head them off.

Bunco Bill wore a set of false whiskers as a means of disguise. But the detectives knew him.

Old King Brady dodged one side of the statue, Harry the other.

The old detective pulled his pistol.

The confidence man and his companions came to a halt. At sight of the detectives the other two bolted and ran.

The Bradys, however, cared little for them. Old King Brady grabbed the crook's false beard and pulled it off, while Harry closed in behind him.

"The game is up!" cried Old King Brady, thrusting his pistol into the Bunco King's face. Harry slipped the handcuffs on him.

The game was up.

Barton fumed and cursed, but all to no avail. He was thrust into a cab and taken to the Tombs.

In half an hour newsboys were on the street hawking the report of the wonderful capture of Bunco Bill. The Bradys received many congratulations.

And so ended the case in a blaze of glory, and the Bradys had scored another great victory. Bunco Bill and his female pal, Dolly Vane, received long sentences.

But the detectives were not left idle. Another equally thrilling case quickly claimed their attention.

THE END.

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